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Richard John Neuhaus

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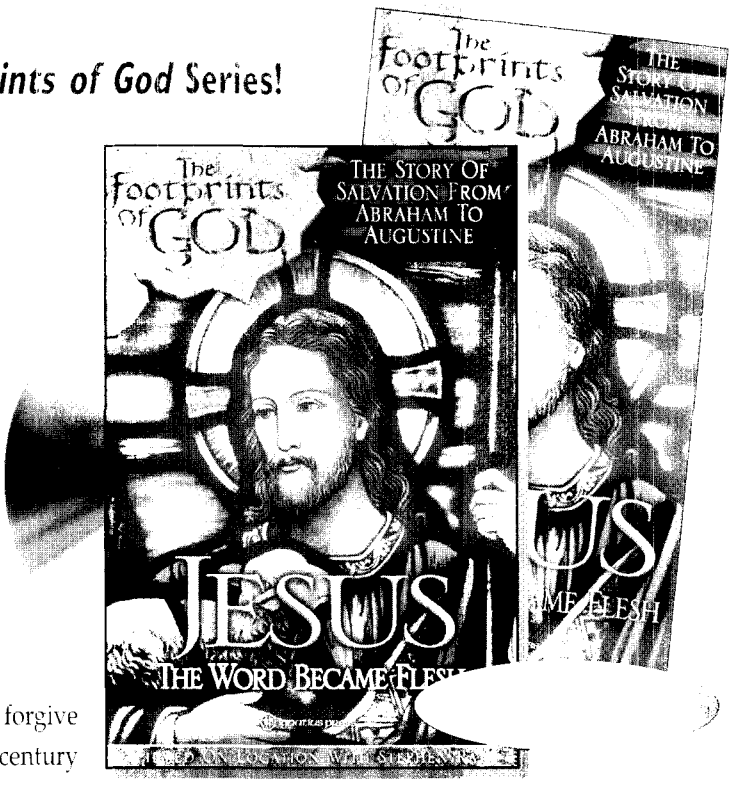

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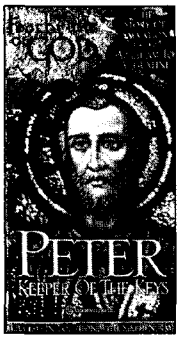

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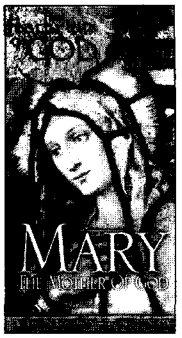

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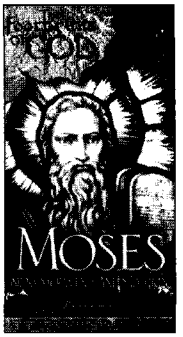

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FIRST THINGS

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Questions of Reform

In "True and False Reform." (August/September), Avery Cardinal Dulles displays his usual clarity and forthrightness.

I do, however, differ from him in a nuanced but important way regarding the *pastoral* theology of Vatican II. I believe that the strength of his exposition on orthodoxy (with which I entirely agree) relies on the conceptual theologizing deriving from Trent, Vatican I, and the new Thomism. In effect, this style of reflection portrays Vatican II as a doctrinal council (especially regarding the ecclesial role of the bishops). As Cardinal Dulles remarks, "The Council exalted the episcopacy to an unprecedented peak of power and responsibility."

My research on Vatican II as a pastoral council leads me to believe that Vatican II was primarily concerned with *meanings* and *values*, not doctrinal truths which had already been established by the Tradition of the Church. Hence, Vatican II's style of reflection is a study in ecclesial subjectivity: i.e., on the corporate meanings and values residing in the ecclesial community. This descriptive, not defining, style of reflection is intent on serving a world in crisis on the model of the Good Samaritan. For this awesome millennial undertaking the Council projected a renewed Christocentric humanism or anthropology.

I have used the term "phenomenology" to elucidate the above "attitude shift" from objectivism to subjectivism, a shift that reflected that philosophy's mid-century popularity in Europe.

John F. Kobler, C.P.
Immaculate Conception
Monastery
Chicago, Illinois

I enjoyed reading Avery Cardinal Dulles' "True and False Reform." I would like him to clarify one statement he makes, and consider a question, both regarding the Lutheran Reformation.

First: In his essay Cardinal Dulles states, "Luther and his colleagues also took up the theme of reform, but in the name of correcting abuses they attacked essentials of the Catholic faith and became separated from the Church." I would like to ask what "essentials of the Catholic faith" the Lutheran Reformers attacked, particularly since the presenters of the Augsburg Confession in 1530 took great pains to claim that their teachings were not contrary to catholic faith:

> We have related only matters which we have considered it necessary to adduce and mention in order that it may be made very clear that we have introduced nothing, either in doctrine or in ceremonies, that is contrary to Holy Scripture or the universal Christian Church.

Further, Cardinal Dulles' statement suggests that the Lutheran Reformers themselves created the break with Rome. Yet repeatedly in the Augsburg Confession the Reformers state that their goal is the unity of the Church:

> Thus the matters at issue between us . . . may be discussed amicably and charitably, our differences may be reconciled, and we may be united in one, true religion, even as we are all under one Christ. . . . We on our part shall not omit doing anything, in so far as God and conscience allow, that may serve the cause of Christian unity.

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At Augsburg the Lutheran Reformers sought to present a Catholic statement of faith, based on Scripture and tradition; their chief aim was the unity of the Church. That they "became separated" was not a result of their actions, but that the "jury"—i.e., the papal representatives and allies, which included the emperor—had in effect decided the verdict in advance and rejected the Augsburg Confession once it was presented without the possibility of further discussion.

Second, Cardinal Dulles suggests eight "principles by which reform proposals in our day might be assessed." Reading through them, could not the Lutheran Reformation, at least in its official document of the Augsburg Confession (not Luther's actions per se), be considered a genuine reform movement within the Catholic Church? A strong case could be made that the proposals of the Lutheran Reformers, certainly at the Diet of Augsburg, met the tests of the eight principles Cardinal Dulles sets forth in his essay.

These are matters of historical debate. I am not suggesting in any way that Lutheranism today shares the same concern for unity of the Church and faithfulness to Catholic teaching that the Reformers at the Diet of Augsburg did, nor does it meet the test of the principles Cardinal Dulles suggests. How Lutheranism has betrayed its own Reformation heritage is another story, about which many more qualified than I have already written.

(The Rev.) Dan Biles
St. Paul Lutheran Church
Spring Grove, Pennsylvania

In "True and False Reform," Avery Cardinal Dulles promotes one reform that is specifically educational: the dissemination of the current *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to the laity. But the current *Catechism* tacitly excludes the traditional understanding of retributive justice as the primary purpose of the death penalty (2266, 2267) and of just war (2307, 2330).

The purpose of punishment, according to the *Catechism*, is to defend society or to provide restitution ("to redress the disorder caused by the offense"), not to exact deserved retribution. As to just war, the *Catechism* omits the traditional Augustinian-Thomistic justification for war—i.e., the punishment of evildoers who deserve to be punished for their wrongdoing—in favor of the justification of national self-defense, which need not coincide with retribution.

The current *Catechism*'s distortion-by-exclusion of the traditional understanding of retributive justice will thrust the Catholic Church directly onto the pathway toward moral irrelevance because if retributive justice has somehow become outdated, then—who knows?—we might be able to save ourselves without the graceful help of the Redeemer.

So why does Cardinal Dulles insist upon disseminating a *Catechism* that distorts the traditional Catholic understanding of retributive justice?

T. Dan Tolleson
Houston, Texas

Avery Cardinal Dulles responds:
The writers of the three letters here printed take my article as an occasion to make some points that are of special concern to themselves. In the first letter Father Kobler repeats his thesis that Vatican II was a phenomenological council. While there is much to be said for that view, the Council cannot be said to have restricted itself to phenomenology. In some cases it exercised clear doctrinal authority. The language of *Lumen Gentium* 20 and 21 (the twice-repeated "This sacred synod teaches . . .") leaves no room for doubt that in these texts the Council was issuing doctrinal statements about the episcopate.

Pastor Biles raises the familiar question whether the Augsburg Confession could be recognized as orthodox by the Catholic Church. During the preparations for the 450th anniversary celebrations of the Confession in 1980, several distinguished theologians contended that such recognition would be possible, but in the end the Holy See stopped short of full recognition. The Pope contented himself with affirming the finding of the German Catholic bishops that they could find in the Augsburg Confession "a full accord on fundamental and central truths." In my judgment the Confession's rejection of the sacrifice of the Mass, of religious vows, and of the power of the bishops to impose laws binding in conscience is very difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with Catholic teaching.

Mr. Tolleson expresses a distaste for the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which I had mentioned only in passing. Unlike him, I regard it as a magnificent, though not flawless, synthesis of Catholic doctrine. It does not put much emphasis on retribution, but it does refer to eternal separation from God and "eternal fire" as punishments inflicted in hell. In speaking of criminal justice it states that the punishment should be "proportionate to the gravity of the offense" and that it may avail to expiate the guilt of the offender.

True, the *Catechism* does not approve of punitive wars, but to the best of my knowledge their legitimacy is not a part of modern Catholic teaching, nor am I aware that it has ever been taught by the Magisterium.

Memory and Moral Agency

"Why Remember?" (August/September), by Gilbert Meilander, is characteristically wise and beauti-

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ful, but should not be read as a judgment that amnesia entails moral impotence. Life, to be sure, is a story to remember, but the nonnarrative potential of each self is even more crucial. And the remnant of reason in a person like "Jimmie G" is fully adequate for its achievement. His life lacks the ordinary experience of temporal succession, but, like any rational person, he remains aware (remembers?) that he is responsible, as Professor Meilander puts it, "to live the story as best one can." And even a memory so stripped of sequential content is up to this universal task. Jimmie's inability to assemble and deploy historical factual details may frustrate his grasp of truth or right conduct in particular circumstances. What he retains is the capacity to say yes or no to that elemental duty to do his best—to keep looking and hoping. This commitment to the search itself is the one act necessary and sufficient to the highest human possibility. I don't read Professor Meilander to the contrary.

John E. Coons
School of Law
University of California
Berkeley, California

Are You Comfortable?

R. R. Reno's connection of an overblown fear of suffering with acedia or spiritual apathy in "Fighting the Noonday Devil" (August/September) gave me an "aha!" moment about a troubling phrase that I hear in conversation nearly every day.

The phrase is the question, "Are you comfortable with that?" The responder then describes his or her degree of "comfort" with a decision about to be made. I have heard a dean in the school where I teach ask other teachers if they are "comfortable" with a decision to suspend a student. I have heard a member of a city agency ask another member at a public hearing if he is "comfortable" with denying a citizen's motion. I hear the comfort question asked over and over again, about decisions large and small. It crowds out questions that should be asked about right and wrong, about justice, about a decision's intellectual or moral benefits.

Professor Reno writes that our vague moral sentiments about suffering as life's major evil "overwhelm our immediate duties and corrupt our ability to function within the complexities of ordinary moral relations." Surely the constant conversational reference to comfort reflects this determination to avoid suffering, no matter what the cost of apathy and inaction.

Ann White
Washington, D.C.

Evasive on Sodomy?

In the course of discussing Senator Rick Santorum's controversial statement about sodomy (While We're At It, August/September), Richard John Neuhaus avers that he is "not a fan of laws that are not intended to be enforced." This strikes me as disappointingly evasive, as it is not often that one sees Father Neuhaus evade a controversy.

Perhaps he could clarify for FIRST THINGS readers: Would he support the anti-sodomy law (now ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court) if it were intended to be enforced? Sen. Santorum, as Fr. Neuhaus acknowledges, merely asseverated Roman Catholic orthodoxy on the question of homosexuality. And the good people of Texas, acting through their duly elected representatives in passing a law against sodomy, have also affirmed in the simplest republican means open to them, that same Roman Catholic and, more broadly, Christian orthodoxy. Would Fr. Neuhaus support its enforcement? Or does he believe that some principle of jurisprudence, political philosophy, morality, or mere politics precludes the people of the United States from the democratic affirmation of the faith of their fathers?

Most conservatives have been fully willing to castigate the *Lawrence* decision for its dubious arguments, its implications for same-sex marriage, and its creeping obliteration of the principle of federalism in what Justice Antonin Scalia called in his dissent "morals legislation." Far fewer conservatives have been willing to positively defend anti-sodomy laws themselves. I recall Ramesh Ponnuru of *National Review*, a talented writer and shrewd analyst, noting with some surprise on *National Review Online*'s web-log, sometime after the Santorum affair, that very close to a majority of Americans (according to poll numbers) actually favor anti-sodomy laws, which is a decidedly different thing than merely favoring the right of legislative bodies to criminalize sodomy without interference from the courts, as Mr. Ponnuru and many right-wing intellectuals do. In my judgment, this revelation suggests that *National Review* may be to the left of the country on the whole question of sexual morality. I am interested as to where Fr. Neuhaus and his fine publication stand.

Paul J. Cella III
Atlanta, Georgia

RJN Responds:
There is nothing evasive in agreeing with Aquinas and many other worthies that not everything immoral can or should be made illegal. Whether Texas should have and enforce an anti-sodomy law is for the people of Texas to determine. In New York, the enforcement of such a law would, in my judgment, be politically impossible

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under existing and foreseeable circumstances, and attempts to pass or enforce such a law would cause severe damage to the common good. In different places and different times, one might be led to a different prudential judgment.

Protestants and Tradition

I note Richard John Neuhaus' response to my review of Thomas Oden's *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy* ("*Haeresis* as Doctrinal Orthodoxy," Public Square, August/September). With no disrespect to Father Neuhaus, I must say in all humility that my critique of Oden's book deserves a better response than that it elevates private judgment over historic Christianity. Such a dismissive response does not take seriously the Protestant critique of Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditionalism.

Fr. Neuhaus' response to my review of Oden's book can almost be reduced to the claim that I am Protestant and insist, as do all classical Protestants, that tradition is second in authority to the written Word of God in matters spiritual and theological. To that I plead guilty. My criticism of Oden's book arises because Oden is also Protestant, and yet his account of the authority of tradition could be interpreted as more consistent with Orthodox and Catholic traditionalism. That does not mean it is therefore automatically wrong; it only means that those committed to Protestant principles may want to pay close attention to Oden's direction and consider whether they can go there with him. My review appeared in a publication read primarily (although not exclusively) by Protestants.

Roger E. Olson
Professor of Theology
George W. Truett
Theological Seminary
Baylor University
Waco, Texas

RJN responds:
I do not see the pertinence of Professor Olson's having reviewed the Oden book for a Protestant audience. In fact, it is precisely for that audience that the conventional pitting of Scripture vs. tradition needs to be challenged. Oden, a leading participant in the project Evangelicals and Catholics Together, is not, as I understand it, agreeing with "Orthodox and Catholic traditionalism" but is proposing a more coherent Protestant approach to the interpretation of Scripture.

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OPINION

Johnny of the Cross

Peter M. Candler, Jr.

In the world of popular music, one generally becomes a "legend" only in death—as if death accomplishes for a musician all that he was unable to do for himself in life. Legends are often made in the *manner* of their death—in a helicopter crash, say, or collapsed on the bathroom floor. But Johnny Cash's death at seventy-one on September 12 was decidedly un-legend-like: silent, slow, and unspectacular. Yet "legend" seems, if anything, not big enough a word to describe Johnny Cash.

We all knew the end was coming, particularly after June Carter, to everyone's shock, beat him to it. But the impact of the news was not thereby diminished. On that Friday we lost possibly America's most singular individual. I don't think that it's too much of a stretch to say that in Johnny's death a little bit of what is best about America died, too.

The only word that seems to suffice here is *magnanimity.* The *OED* defines it poetically: "In Aristotle's sense of *megalopsuchia* . . . loftiness of thought or purpose, grandeur of designs, nobly ambitious spirit. *Now rare.*" That was Johnny Cash: great-souled, rare. Everything about him was as big and black and broad as the Arkansas delta, from his physical stature and persona to "that" voice.

Yet his life cannot be reduced to a metaphor. It was more than just one of noble ambition or grandeur of design; Johnny's virtues were just as hard-fought as his vices. In life Johnny Cash struggled for and against the God whose grip on him was so frustratingly and thankfully relentless that it was able to absorb all that fierce rage and all those addictions. Johnny could sing about murder and God in the same song and with the same voice because to do otherwise would have been dishonest. At the same time, he let that despair, agony, and rejection stand on their own—he lent them integrity. There was no serious salvation unless there was first some serious sin. Cash echoed St. Paul: "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." But there is at least one thing that Cash never was, and that is a moralist. He did not chalk doubt up to a misunderstanding. Rather, Cash showed that doubt is itself proper to faith. A God who could not stomach the darkest moments of His creation was not worth our worship, much less a song.

About three years ago, my wife and I took a weekend trip from Durham to Wilmington, North Carolina, where she was to attend a conference related to her work. One of her colleagues also traveled with her husband, a gourmet grocery store manager and guitar player, whose musical tastes tend toward dark, brooding Germanic bands with wicked-sounding names like *Einsturzende Neubauten* and *Godspeed You Black Emperor* (both of which I had never heard of). He has little use for religion, except as it pertains to Egyptian archaeology. Over a whiskey in the bar at the Hilton Hotel in Wilmington we chatted about music. Eventually the conversation turned to Johnny. At one point he raised his hand, pointed his finger at me for emphasis, and said, "If I were going to believe in God, I would believe in the God of Johnny Cash."

Johnny could serve as a mediator of friendship, the kind of personality that could reconcile the most disparate of people. So there we were in the bar of the Hilton, he a reformed heroin addict and son of a Durham cop, wearing a *keffiyeh*, and I, the theology geek from Buckhead. We became friends, not least because of Johnny Cash.

But more than that, Johnny was the kind of person who could simultaneously hold in tension the conflicting parts of his personality and communicate to those who are alienated by a deeply counterfeit culture—particularly a counterfeit Christianity. Cash could preach to offenders and the defenseless alike, and make faith believable in a way that most of us never can. We seem to prefer the smile that conceals an inner deception to the honest purgative truth about ourselves. But with Johnny it was otherwise.

That's because he lived, sang, and played truthfully. There was in him no hint of fraud. At a time when he could have resurrected his career by riding the coattails of others' popularity (as is the trend today), Johnny did the reverse. On 1994's *American Recordings* (on the cover he stands in a field wearing a long black preacher's coat, alone except for two dogs), he did not simply return to the "old" Johnny Cash and commodify himself for a younger audience. Rather, he signed with a punk label and sang about his familiar subjects, but this time with no musical accompaniment beyond his own acoustic guitar. All kinds of audiences ate it up because they recognized that in a world full of fakes, Cash was authentic.

There are so many aspects to Cash's career that are unmatched in popular music. He is the only person to be inducted to the respective halls of fame for rock

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musicians, country artists, and songwriters. Possibly more striking than the body of songs he left us are the songs written by others that he covered. Cash was always taking risks here—he was one of the first musicians outside the folk world to cover songs by Bob Dylan. On Johnny's later records, we hear a musician not content to rest on his laurels or piggyback on others' record sales. Rather, he took other people's songs and made them Johnny Cash tunes.

In this sense, a song like "The Mercy Seat" was a Johnny Cash song all along, as if its author, Nick Cave, just tended to it until it found its true voice. This is not to denigrate the original—far from it. Rather, some songs transcend their own authors in such a way that they can only be sung by a particular voice. This was literally the case with "The Wanderer," a U2 song that the band's lead singer, Bono, penned and tried to record. He finally gave up, admitting that the only person who could sing the lyrics was Johnny.

The same could be said for Johnny's last single in his lifetime, a cover of Trent Reznor's "Hurt." I doubt whether in time it will be remembered principally for having been written by the frontman for the techno-punk band Nine Inch Nails, because Cash so completely inhabits the song that it becomes his own musical last will and testament. At the end of his life Cash sings,

I hurt myself today
To see if I still feel
I focus on the pain
The only thing that's real

The needle tears a hole
The old familiar sting
Try to kill it all away
But I remember everything

Does the needle deliver heroin or an IV? A narcotic or a painkiller? When Cash recorded "Hurt" in 2002, he had already been suffering from a variety of ailments for several years. There is a poignancy to his frank confession of the reality of pain that rings all the truer for his having sung it.

Critics did not regard the later editions of the *American* series with the same awe that they did the first. The last one he released while still alive, *American IV: The Man Comes Around*, was well-received, but some critics wondered why we needed another version of standards like "Give My Love to Rose." We needed it because, when sung by a seventy-year-old and frail Cash, it is a very different song than the same tune sung by the same man at age twenty-four. For now the character in the song who lies at the side of the railroad tracks is very much Cash himself.

For this reason *American IV* actually has more coherence and power than his previous two releases in the series. Every song on the record is about death—the title track, "I Hung My Head," "We'll Meet Again." What is "Danny Boy," after all, but a funeral dirge? It is precisely here that Cash's final years were in some ways his greatest. On his final album, he was teaching us how to die. And in a culture that by and large loves death but does not know what to do with it—a culture simultaneously repulsed and attracted by it—Johnny's confrontation with his own imminent demise was largely misunderstood. The critics who complained that his voice was not what it used to be missed the point entirely. It is precisely *because* his voice was not what it used to be that the songs have such power. The beauty of the record lies in that very frailty, the tremolo in his voice that became more pronounced with each album. Even in his younger days, the inimitable strength and fortitude in his voice was mixed with the occasional moment of weakness, the odd quaver and show of vulnerability. In the last few years those moments became more frequent, and his voice became more diaphonous, disclosing more of the effects of illness.

Yet for that very reason, Cash's voice was all the more beautiful—it had a weakness stronger than others' strengths. Nowhere is this more clear than on the music video for "Hurt," directed by Mark Romanek. As with most of the songs on *American IV*, the vocals for "Hurt" were recorded dry—without the use of reverb, delay, or other effects. That in itself is remarkable, because recording a voice that way reveals all the idiosyncrasies and flaws that a digital effect might otherwise cover up. Nowadays almost no one records vocals this way. The unadorned character of the voice is echoed visually in the film by Cash's refusal to conceal, with the use of makeup and other gimmickry, the fact that he is dying. No attempt is made to shoot his face from the most flattering angle, no effort to shun the ravaged face of a once indomitable figure now consumed by disease.

Towards the end of the video, the song crescendos to an intense height, accentuated by the repetition of a single note on the piano. Superimposed on all of this is a rapid montage of footage from Cash's prime, when his hair was still black and his jaw still square. Juxtaposed beside flashes of his successes are images of the Cash museum in a state of disrepair, broken shards of those successes whose significance is now altogether subverted by the figure of Cash himself, sitting at the head of the festal table. And in between visions of the spry young superstar and the remnants of fame is the recur-

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ring image of the crucifixion. The climax of the film comes when Cash, with a crystal goblet full of red wine lifted and trembling in his enfeebled right hand, turns the cup over and empties its contents over the table, baptizing the sumptuous banquet laid out before him.

For Cash there was no empty cross but a crucifix, which neither concealed the horrors of suffering nor prematurely removed the bleeding Christ to a higher plane. In the end, it seems all his life's vices—and even his virtues—were consumed by the blood of Christ. The truth of Cash's music, and of his life, lies in the image of the crucified Jesus—who dies alone and forsaken, simultaneously consummating the whole creation and crippled by its weight. For Cash, redemption was not won without a fight: "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrew 9:22). He sings,

And you could have it all
My empire of dirt
I will let you down
I will make you hurt

Johnny Cash died in a way that demonstrated what it might mean to die well. Unlike those who die quickly, he was graced with the company of friends and loved ones, yet he never used his illness as a pretense or a front. His end was slow, painful, marked with tremendous accomplishments (even for a healthy person), but he drew near it honestly and unsentimentally. His spirit was scarred, busted, threadbare, but fearless, peaceable, witty and wise. In his living, playing, loving, and singing, he also sounded out the timbre of the Christian faith and showed how it ought to be lived: stammeringly, tunefully, with no overdubs and no effects. But most of all, with soul.

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Jobs and Babies

Mary Beth Celio

It seems that most people who write about the joys and challenges of childrearing today are parents newly facing the daunting prospect of raising Christian children in a largely hostile world. They tell of the dilemmas facing professional couples trying to decide how to meet their responsibilities to job, gender, and progeny. They can only see the road ahead and all its possible complications. I would like to add another perspective—that of a full-time professional woman who has spent over thirty years mothering five children, has used every known form of paid child care except a live-in nanny, was a stay-at-home mother for a short time, and whose children have lived to tell the tale. We still have a daughter in high school, but the other four children are well on their way to maturity, with nine university degrees among them so far. More important, all are intelligent, committed, and enthusiastic Catholics.

Based on my many years of working full-time in secular and Catholic research organizations, while also spending endless hours agonizing over the question of how my husband and I could best raise our children, I have some words of advice for women who find themselves in the same place I have been for much of my adult life.

To begin with, have the luck or long-range-planning skills to identify a career that can be done part-time or at home when your children need you there. My own field of demographic/statistical research was not preplanned. I fully believe it was a gift, unasked for because I never knew to ask. It is something I've been able to practice full- and part-time on both sides of the country and in several settings. My daughter-in-law is a doctor who will be able to tailor her work hours to the needs of her new baby; my daughters are preparing for jobs in clinical psychology, academic research, and college counseling, where it is possible to keep involved, but not fully-involved, for some period of time. This is not always possible. My bank-officer sister, for example, had to fight to maintain part-time status and was laid-off at the first sign of a business slowdown. As one of my daughters recently noted: one way to make God laugh is to say "I have a plan." But having a flexible career field is a real advantage.

Women would also be wise to resist the seductions of full-time work altogether. A woman who is competent, well-trained, and experienced is a valuable commodity and bosses will want her there full-time. One of the nightmares of my own experience occurred when our son was around three years old. I would go to my research job at 5:00 a.m. for a few hours before my husband left for work. When the nanny arrived, I'd head back to work. Then came the morning when my husband found our son, frantic and shaking, hiding under a table. He had searched fruitlessly for me (at work) and his dad (in the shower) until he was certain we had abandoned him forever. I rushed home and phoned in my resignation. However, a woman who finishes research proposals in the recovery room after delivering a baby is too valuable to lose, so I was offered the opportunity to work my own hours wher-

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ever I wanted. Unfortunately, I soon found myself seduced into more and more hours away from home. In other words, the decisions made for the good of your children have to be made again and again.

Making them easier might require moving to another neighborhood to find more affordable housing. For our family, it meant moving from Washington, D.C., to an island in Puget Sound where, I can assure you, there are few temptations to full-time professional work for women. I got a taste of full-time mothering. The blessings were many, one of the most palpable being the time I tried to get my three-year-old to nap next to me. I was praying with my eyes shut and when she asked me what I was doing (at least her twentieth question) I said I was telling God about her and the new baby about to be born. I suggested that she could close her eyes and talk to God, too—a shabby trick on my part to get her to drop off to sleep. When I looked over a short time later, she was sitting bright-eyed and glowing. She looked at me and said: "He told me He loved me!"

There is no way to replace the love and care of a parent, but sometimes it becomes necessary (or seems necessary) to use a temporary substitute. And when it does, nothing works better than choosing someone who matches your faith commitment. Over the years, we have made some good and some great decisions on caretakers; fortunately, none has been disastrous, though some came close. There was the childcare center that left our five-year-old daughter with the janitor when a snowstorm threatened, and the nanny who decided the gash in another daughter's chin was not serious enough to bother with, leaving our daughter with a permanent scar. At the other end of the spectrum was the elderly woman who had escaped Hungary in 1950 and testified by her every decision that children and family were the most precious things in the world. She would cut up precise slices of apples to go with the cookies she made and walk the children to the nearby library in her black dress and high-topped black shoes. And there was the neighborhood woman who took care of generations of children in her multi-storied home, starting each day with Mass where she prayed for each of the children and their parents.

Regardless of how much child care a family needs to use, women should make sure they nurse their babies for as long as they possibly can. There is nothing that kept me so grounded during all those frantic years, and nothing that kept me as connected to my children, as the minutes I spent at night or at dawn sitting in a rocking chair or lying in bed snuggling with the baby. A woman's body is made to adapt to the nursing needs of her baby. There are moments of discomfort, and some explanations needed, but women shouldn't give this up for anything.

When it comes to education, there's nothing better, in my experience, than a Catholic school. Some parishes don't have one, and in some families both parents would have to work simply to pay the tuition. But I have done years of research on Catholic schools on a local and national level, and the benefits of those schools for children, families, parishes, and the Church are verifiable. (It is likely that other Christian schools provide equivalent advantages, but the research isn't available as yet.) The research I've done among high school students shows that going to a Catholic middle school (grades 6-8) and having parents who go to church is highly correlated with being drug/alcohol free and avoiding sexual activity in high school. There are many other benefits, to be sure, but to parents of teenagers these are among the most important. Even before I had done most of my research, we decided to take our children thirty miles each way by ferry and freeway in an old VW bus to a Catholic school. Twenty years later, we still know this was the right decision because the school (with strong urging from us and other parents) reinforced the values we wanted our children to live by and provided a stable community for many children who did not otherwise have one.

But no matter where children attend school, it is essential to be "there" for the children after school. For me, this meant leaving work every day to pick up the children and take them home. The lesson I learned is that news of the big events of the day—the great test score, the snub by a supposed friend, the skinned knee—won't survive the time between leaving school and your arrival home from work. It's these things that make up the texture of children's lives and that parents need to share. At the very least, there should be a phone call to capture those events. The seductions of work are such that "leaving early to pick up the kids" tends to get put off in order to finish a report, complete a phone call, or check in with a colleague. I still have the nightmare in which I race to the school to find the children unreachable behind a glass wall at the end of a long brick tunnel. This is not a happy dream. Be on time.

I have heard a number of women who work full-time outside their homes say they spend "quality" time with their children every day reading bedtime stories. This is important, of course, but it is no substitute for quantity. The quality time that built the foundation for the relationship that my husband and I now have with our children was made up of scrubbing them down and toweling them off in the bathtub, leaping from bed when the stomach flu hit in the middle of the night, grubbing through the leaves to find potato bugs for the science project, and sewing a Luke Skywalker costume for the next day's Halloween party. None of this is

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glamorous and much of it isn't fun, but it is what makes up the life of a child.

The importance of quantity time doesn't diminish when the children reach their teenage years. Being woken up every three hours to nurse a ravenous baby is nothing compared to staying awake after a long day in order to attend to the emotional needs of the child who didn't make the basketball team, has gotten in over her head in a dating relationship, or has to decide what college to attend. There is probably no training regimen that would prepare a parent physically for these marathon events, but every minute spent attending to that child is worth it. I found it extremely helpful to pray (silently) throughout these extended in-person or phone conversations. Annie Lamott, in her wonderful book *Traveling Mercies*, opines that we have only two real prayers: "Help me! Help me! Help me!" and "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" I would use the first throughout the sessions and the second later on.

And that brings me to my final bit of advice. When I talk to other parents, I remind them to keep praying for their children. Every day, all day. We all make a lot of mistakes and, for many parents today, these mistakes have to do with their own career and life decisions. The mistakes will be fewer, and their results less disastrous, if all the decisions are made with prayer and if prayer accompanies each of the children every moment of their day.

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A Bible for Everyone

Alan Jacobs

One summer years ago, I attended a conference that met at Princeton Theological Seminary; we participants stayed in the seminary dormitory. We soon discovered that the lounge on the first floor of the dorm had been converted into a kind of outsized study. A large table dominated the room; scattered across its surface were dozens of hefty books, many of them held open by other books. A group of men sat around the table from morning to evening, sometimes rising to consult one of the piled tomes. Whenever we walked past we could see them framed in a large picture window like figures in a painting. I half-expected to find a neat brass plaque screwed to the windowsill and bearing a single word: *Scholarship*.

One evening I returned to the dorm to find a colleague pressed against the hallway wall, inches from the open door to the converted lounge. He looked like a TV cop, ready at any moment to spin and fire bullets into the room; but he was just listening to the murmured debates of the scholars within. Later that evening I asked him what had captured his interest. He responded, "Didn't you know? They're working on the new RSV"—that is, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. The chair of the committee, Bruce Metzger, taught at Princeton Seminary and had convened his fellow translators there.

I suppose one could characterize the scene as just another committee meeting, but it carries a certain romance for me. After all, it was a similar group that, four hundred years ago, met to hammer out what would become the King James Bible. One of the six "Companies" of James' Translators—the one led by the great preacher and churchman Lancelot Andrewes—gathered in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey, and in 1947 the scholars at work on the New English Bible (NEB) met in the same room, presumably in hopes that inspiration lingered there. (T. S. Eliot doubted that their hopes had been realized, affirming that the NEB's New Testament "astonishes in its combination of the vulgar, the trivial, and the pedantic.")

The scholars' choice of workplace was a statement of purpose: C. H. Dodd, their effective leader, wrote that "we should like to produce a translation which may receive general recognition as an authoritative second version" alongside the King James Version (KJV). He wisely did not claim to be seeking to replace the KJV, but it was clear that he hoped for their work to eclipse the other alternatives. Amid the current proliferation of translations, that hope is hard to sustain; but, I would argue, it is worth sustaining. And, for the first time in my lifetime, a translation has appeared that could potentially fill the bill: it's called the English Standard Version (ESV), and it's the best thing to come out of a committee meeting in quite a while.

Before considering the excellence of the ESV, we must take some time to understand a little more about the range of translations that enrich, or afflict, our world today. Let's begin with the Living Bible. The Living Bible—a paraphrase, not a translation—was produced by a single man, Kenneth N. Taylor,

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and was published by Tyndale House in 1971; it sought to provide access to Scripture for those who found *all* translations too formidable. Its enormous success led the people at Tyndale to suspect that a genuine translation based on similar principles might also be successful, and in 1996 the New Living Translation (NLT) appeared. We may begin to approach the problems facing a translation that would seek to be universal, or something close to it, by looking at the very first page of the introduction to the NLT. The translators, as one might expect, attempt to distinguish their work from the other available versions, and they do so by claiming that they have produced a "thought-for-thought" (or what is usually called a "dynamic equivalence") translation and then explaining what this means:

> The value of a thought-for-thought translation can be illustrated by comparing 1 Kings 2:10 in the King James Version, the New International Version, and the New Living Translation. "So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David" (KJV). "Then David rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David" (NIV). "Then David died and was buried in the City of David" (NLT). Only the New Living Translation clearly translates the real meaning of the Hebrew idiom "slept with his fathers" into contemporary English.

I remember clearly the first time I read these words; I smiled sadly and put the book away, knowing that I would not use it.

My complaint can be easily stated: the author of this introduction does not know the difference between an idiom and a metaphor. It is a distinction both simple and vital. It is highly unlikely that a Jew of David's time, or at any time in Israel's history, would have found a family member's dead body and run to tell everyone that grandpa was now sleeping with his fathers. Hebrew has words to express quite directly that someone has died; the chronicler of Kings chooses here to eschew them in favor of a particularly hieratic and formal way of describing the death of David. When (in 2 Samuel 1) a man comes from the camp of Israel's army to report to David, he says simply that Saul (along with his son Jonathan) has died. The deaths of Saul and Jonathan are given no cultural or political meaning, because by the time this history was written the people of Israel no longer identified Saul as having special importance for their national identity. David, by contrast, is for the Israelites their first true King, the head of a proper dynastic line; therefore he does not merely die, he "sleeps with his fathers" in Jerusalem, the "city of David." The phrase is not an idiom—a common phrase lacking an evident literal meaning—instead, it is a carefully chosen *image* of David's place in the culture of Israel. The meaning of the phrase may not be immediately evident to the average reader; but the scholar who on those grounds removes it does not translate but interprets. (It is true, of course, that every translation is in some sense an interpretation; but translators are not thereby liberated from the need to strive for fidelity; and only a sense of fidelity would lead a translation committee to erase distinctions the original text strove to preserve.)

What is really being revealed here is not clarity or forcefulness of translation, but the modern biblical scholar's mistrust of figurative language. Some years ago Gerald Hammond noted that many recent translations of the Bible "eschew anything which smacks of imagery or metaphor—based on the curious assumption, I guess, that modern English is an image-free language." One could find no better illustration of Hammond's point than the sentence "Then David died and was buried in the City of David."

Some portions of the NLT are quite useful. The translators do an especially good job of disentangling Paul's syntax and making his message comprehensible and even compelling. But the translators' failure to discriminate among some of the basic kinds of figurative language is disturbing. How did this lamentable situation come to pass?

The answer—as I have noted in these pages in another context ("Preachers without Poetry," August/September 1999)—lies in the great divorce between literary people and biblical scholars. When King James commissioned his Companies of Translators, the people most thoroughly educated in the various humanistic disciplines were also those most learned in the biblical tongues. The celebrated "poetic" or "literary" qualities of the KJV are a function of this long-lost union. But in the last two centuries the training of biblical scholars in what has come to be called the "grammatical-historical" method has assumed a character alien to the literary and rhetorical education rooted in the schools of the Roman Empire. A model of Christian learning shared—not altogether but to some degree—by Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin had virtually disappeared by the end of the eighteenth century.

This happened largely as a result of Protestant theologians' responses to Catholic charges that they, lacking guidance and correction from a Magisterium, were liable to say pretty much anything about the Bible. The charge stung: What *was* to prevent this or that Protes-

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tant leader from offering a bizarre interpretation of some passage of Scripture and claiming as warrant for it the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? From the need to answer this charge arose *the* characteristic trait of Protestant biblical scholarship: an obsession with method. Method would be the Protestant scholar's Magisterium—that is, his or her principle of constraint and limitation; therefore, ultimately, training in biblical exegesis would become training in the kinds of intellectual skills that could be described in methodological terms: grammar, textual history, historical philology, and so on. Sensitivity to metaphorical nuance is perforce *not* a part of this training; nor is general literary knowledge. Thus C. S. Lewis' complaint that a scholar whose "literary experiences of [the biblical] texts lack any standard of comparison such as can only grow from a wide and deep and genial experience of literature in general" is not wholly reliable as a guide. "If he tells me that something in a Gospel is legend or romance, I want to know how many legends and romances he has read, how well his palate is trained in detecting them by the flavor."

Lewis' gustatory metaphor is apt here, because he is describing interpretive skills that are really skills (they can be acquired, practiced, and transmitted) but cannot be articulated in methodological terms. Good reading—and therefore good translating—requires discerning judgment, and method can't produce that. Many biblical scholars, of course, *are* quite skilled in literary analysis—more than I am; but such skills are not expected of many exegetes-in-training as part of their education.

It is not clear to me how this state of affairs can be remedied. I could lament the "increasing specialization of knowledge," as many do, but this would be disingenuous, because the *specialization* of knowledge is a function of the *increase* of knowledge. We simply know far more today about the Hebrew language and ancient Near Eastern cultures (including their family structures, clothing, diet, agricultural practices, and economic systems) than James' Companies of Translators could have dreamed of.

I do not suggest, then, that biblical scholars today should skimp such erudition and focus attention instead on memorizing dictionaries of literary and rhetorical terms. What I do want to suggest is that the translators of the ESV have handled this problem about as well as it can be handled, and that their judgment in this regard goes a long way towards making their translation the best now available in English.

The key principle that the ESV's translation team employed is simple yet profound: deference to existing excellence. It is a principle that was employed by James' Translators themselves, who graciously acknowledged their enormous debt to their predecessors: "Truly (good Christian Reader) we never thought from the beginning, that we should need to make a new Translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one . . . but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principal good one, not justly to be excepted against; that hath been our endeavor, that our mark." The same rule of deference to wise elders guided the late-nineteenth-century scholars who produced the American Standard Version and (English) Revised Version (RV); indeed, the instructions given to the latter group began with this directive: "To introduce as few alterations as possible into the text of the Authorized Version consistent with faithfulness." And similar commitments governed the RSV, whose preface cites the very passage from King James' Translators I just quoted.

But with more recent translations things have changed, for two reasons. First, it is generally agreed that "King James language" ("thees and thous") is unsustainable because alien to current usage. But the second, and more important, reason for the abandonment of strongly conservative principles of revision is the rise of a new theory of translation—the aforementioned "dynamic equivalence" or "thought-for-thought" approach, as pioneered by Eugene Nida. My colleague Leland Ryken, who was on the Translation Oversight Committee for the ESV, has provided a fine account of the consequences—largely unpleasant—of the widespread acceptance of dynamic equivalence models of translation: see his recent *The Word of God in English* (Crossway, 2003). So I will not pursue that matter further here except to note that if you believe that the KJV, RV, RSV, and other older versions were produced by people laboring under a faulty "word-for-word" translation theory, you will see little reason for retaining their work—just as you will see little reason for retaining the metaphors of the original writing, since those metaphors are, in the dynamic-equivalence view, themselves merely vehicles for some unvarnished and unfigurative "thought."

You will therefore have David die, rather than sleep with his fathers; and if the Lord is your shepherd, rather than say "I shall not want," you'll say, "I have everything I need." And when Jesus addresses those of "little faith"? James' Translators have him ask, "If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you?" But you will suspect the metaphor of clothing and therefore translate it away, in the process eliminating the oven also and replacing it with a stone-dead cliché: "And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't he more surely care for you?"

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By contrast, the ESV, recognizing the elegant force with which James' scholars rendered these passages, leaves them virtually unchanged. What is at work here is the humble recognition that our ancestors in the faith may have had certain skills now neglected or forgotten —may have had their palates trained to detect certain flavors that we today cannot distinguish.

Now, from what I have written so far one might conclude that a "revision" of the KJV that left the text unaltered would be ideal. That is sometimes my feeling, but not my considered judgment. Robert Alter has written that the problem with the KJV is its shaky sense of Hebrew, while the problem with more recent versions is their shaky sense of English; but we do not gain by exchanging the latter for the former. (And even the beauty of the KJV is bought at the price of stylistic uniformity.) No, the KJV had to be revised, sometimes drastically; but that is no reason to cast aside what James' Translators did superlatively well.

It is the ESV's *balance* of thorough, up-to-date scholarship and deference to the elders' wisdom that makes it the best available English Bible. What this means, further, is that the ESV is the best candidate yet for the long-hoped-for "replacement" of the KJV, the translation that bridges denominational gaps and strikes the right balance among the virtues of clarity, correctness, and grace.

Is this a pipe dream? Certainly, impediments are many. Publishers will continue to commission new translations and promote existing ones—there's gold in them thar hills—but churches need not be governed by those imperatives. The divisions of Christendom are more intractable: that the ESV was produced largely by evangelicals would be a red flag for many even if the translation included the Apocrypha, which at the moment it does not. The ESV's website says that HarperCollins UK "may" produce such a version; but even if it does it is hard to imagine the Catholic Church endorsing a translation produced by non-Catholics.

Still, if official agreement on a truly "standard" English Bible remains unlikely, I believe that readers and lovers of the Bible would do well to seek considerably more agreement than we now have about the Bible that we read. Everyone who grew up with the KJV feels the loss of a shared language, of particular words and phrases that resonated in the common ear—words and phrases whose meanings could be tested, considered, deployed and redeployed in an infinitely varied set of contexts. I think now of all those generations of the English-speaking peoples separating the wheat from the chaff, lying down in green pastures, sometimes being weighed in the balance and found wanting but at other times fighting the good fight—the whole vast array of discourse (much of it richly metaphorical) tells us that it is very difficult to share *thoughts* when we do not share *language*. And since Christians are counseled to be of one mind, they should be more attentive to the particular words that shape and form our minds. To have once again a widely shared English Bible—"one principal good one"—would be a significant step towards that one mind in Christ.

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Establishing Free Exercise

Vincent Phillip Muñoz

If conservative and liberal church-state scholars agree on one thing, it is that the Supreme Court's religious liberty jurisprudence is a disaster. No single rule exists to guide decision making. The various doctrines employed are, at best, inconsistent and, at worst, blatantly contradictory. Divisions on the Court run so deep that actions demanded by "free exercise" according to some Justices violate "no-establishment" according to others. The result is an ever shifting, case-by-case jurisprudence based on narrow factual questions that encourages neither the rule of law nor a robust protection of religious freedom.

The history of contradictory decisions and doctrinal uncertainty could come to an end, however, if the Supreme Court acts decisively during the 2003-2004 term. Two cases on the docket will provide the Court a remarkable opportunity to reconsider its religious liberty precedents. If it can muster the will, the Court could reconstitute its religion jurisprudence, unifying the no-establishment and free exercise provisions into a coherent whole that recognizes the legitimate concerns of both sides of the debate while, at the same time, respecting our nation's founding heritage.

In potentially one of the most explosive church-state cases ever, the 2003-2004 Court will decide whether public school teacher-led recitations of the Pledge of Allegiance violate the First Amendment's ban on laws "respecting an establishment of religion." In 1954, Congress added the words "under God" to the Pledge. When signing the act into law, President Eisenhower declared, "Millions of our school children will daily proclaim in every city and town, every village and rural schoolhouse, the dedication of our nation and our people to the Almighty." That very reasoning led Michael Newdow, an atheist lawyer with a daughter in a California public school, to challenge the Pledge's constitutionality. Newdow argued that although his daughter was not required to recite the Pledge, she was injured "when compelled to watch and listen as her state-employed teacher in her state-run school led her classmates in a ritual proclaiming that there is a God, and that ours is 'one nation under God.'" In mid-2002, a federal Ninth Circuit appellate panel agreed, ruling that the added words constituted an establishment of religion. President Bush and members of Congress from both sides of the aisle loudly decried the decision, which led the Ninth Circuit immediately to delay its implementation and to move for reconsideration. In a surprising show of resolve, however, a second Ninth Circuit panel reaffirmed the original ruling in early 2003, again declaring the Pledge unconstitutional.

Given the public and political outcry, it is not surprising that the Supreme Court agreed to hear the case on appeal. It may be more difficult than it seems, however, to save the amended Pledge. For starters, the Ninth Circuit's decision is remarkably cogent, follows established Supreme Court precedents, and does not possess any of the characteristics typically associated with judicial mischievousness. The carefully crafted opinion demonstrates that under any and all of the Supreme Court's three leading Establishment Clause precedents—"Endorsement," "Lemon," and "Coercion"—the 1954 Pledge violates the Constitution.

The Ninth Circuit began with the "Endorsement" test, a doctrine championed by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and most recently employed in 2002 by Chief Justice William Rehnquist to uphold the use of school vouchers at private religious schools. As its name suggests, the test prohibits the state from "endorsing" religion over irreligion. The Ninth Circuit concluded that "under God" implicitly endorses a particular religious concept, the existence of a singular deity. The facts in *Newdow*, moreover, closely

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parallel those in *Wallace v. Jaffree* (1985), one of the first and most seminal "endorsement" precedents. In that case, the Supreme Court struck down an Alabama moment of silence law because the state legislature added the words "for prayer or meditation" to the original statute, which said only that the public school day should begin with a "moment of silence." The Ninth Circuit reasoned that if adding words suggesting that students may pray impermissibly advances religion, then adding explicitly religious words to a teacher-led recital clearly constitutes an endorsement.

The Ninth Circuit then moved to analysis under the first prong of the "Lemon" test, a three-part test originally set forth by Justice Warren Burger in the 1971 case *Lemon v. Kurtzman*. Justice O'Connor's "Endorsement" doctrine was designed to replace "Lemon," but Burger's framework has shown remarkable staying power despite being frequently ignored. The test's first prong requires legislation to have a valid secular purpose—that is, the state must be able to offer a nonreligious rationale for its action. Because the words "under God" were not a part of the original text, the Ninth Circuit examined the reasons for the addition instead of looking at the Pledge as a whole. The legislative history of the 1954 Act, they found, clearly indicates that Congress intended to acknowledge America's dependence on God and to distinguish American republicanism from atheistic communism. Such intentions patently violate "Lemon's" secular-purpose prong.

The Ninth Circuit concluded with analysis under the "Coercion" test, Justice Anthony Kennedy's proposal for establishment jurisprudence. Teacher-led recitations of the Pledge coerce religious practice, the Ninth Circuit explained, because they place students in the untenable position of choosing between protesting or participating in an exercise with religious content. Given that students did not have to recite the Pledge, the Ninth Circuit seems to be taking an extremely expansive view of coercion, interpreting it to include actions that could make a student feel psychologically uncomfortable. Yet this is the exact interpretation set forth by Justice Kennedy in his precedent-setting *Lee v. Weisman* (1992) opinion. In that case, the Supreme Court held that exposing a junior high student to an officially approved nondenominational graduation prayer constitutes undue psychological coercion of religious practice. The Ninth Circuit reasoned that if merely being present while others pray at a single, non-mandatory, end-of-the-year school function is coercive, so too is listening to a daily recital containing religious language.

Given the rules that the Supreme Court has laid down and how they have been applied, the Ninth Circuit's decision is not outlandish. A candid evaluation must admit that it lies within a fair reading of Establishment Clause precedents. Therein lies the problem and the opportunity for the 2003-2004 Supreme Court.

The Pledge case reveals that something has gone drastically wrong with Establishment Clause jurisprudence. If the Pledge is unconstitutional, so too are teacher-led recitations of the Gettysburg Address. Lincoln claimed "that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom." Teaching public school students that the Declaration of Independence is true—that our rights are, in fact, "endowed by our Creator" and that the American Revolution was just according to the "Laws of Nature and of Nature's God"—would violate the Constitution. Even an invited performer signing "God Bless America" at a government-sponsored event, like a local county fair, would be constitutionally suspect. *Newdow* confirms what critics have long claimed: that pushed to its logical conclusion, the various "wall of separation" constructions of the Establishment Clause are hostile toward religious sentiment and drive religion out of the public square. The case demonstrates that the current interpretations of the Establishment Clause are not neutral and are unworkable and thus fit the criteria for being overturned.

If the Supreme Court does rethink its establishment jurisprudence, it should do so with an eye toward religious free exercise. In the past, the First Amendment's two religious provisions (note, there is only one clause) have been read independently of one another. If the First Amendment is internally consistent, however, any plausible interpretation of establishment ought to be consistent with free exercise. Free exercise, in fact, is the more fundamental value. Too often it is forgotten that the reason why Congress and the states (since incorporation) are prohibited from making an establishment is that religious establishments tend to abridge religious liberty.

Religious free exercise, including the right not to exercise a religion, is the end; no-establishment is a means toward fulfilling that end.

Perhaps providentially, the Court will hear a blockbuster free exercise dispute during the 2003-2004 term. The case, *Davey v. Locke*, was filed by Joshua Davey, a college student in the state of Washington. Davey won a "Promise" scholarship during his senior year in high school, a renewable $1,125 state-funded grant that could be used at any public or private accredited college in the state. Davey enrolled at Northwest College, an accredited Bible college affili-

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ated with the Assembly of God, and declared a double major in Pastoral Ministries and Business Management. This prompted a letter from the state informing him that because he elected to major in Pastoral Ministries and because his college educates students from a distinctly Christian point of view, he would forfeit his scholarship. The statute authorizing the "Promise" scholarship explicitly states, "No aid shall be awarded to any student who is pursuing a degree in theology." The provision was included to ensure compliance with the Washington State Constitution's "Blaine Amendments," which declare, "No public money or property shall be appropriated for or applied to any religious worship, exercise, or instruction, or the support of any religious establishment," and that, "All schools maintained or supported wholly or in part by the public funds shall be forever free of sectarian control."

Davey seems to present an open-and-shut case of religious discrimination and thus a clear violation of religious liberty. Yet if precedent holds, the Court will not invoke free exercise in its decision; in fact, the Court may not even address the case as a religious liberty controversy. For the past ten years, the Supreme Court has adjudicated religious discrimination cases as free speech questions. This strategy has provided religious citizens significant victories, but at the cost of the near elimination of free exercise as a significant constitutional right. In sum, not only has the Court developed a misguided conception of establishment, it has failed to develop a coherent conception of free exercise.

To understand why free exercise has all but disappeared from constitutional litigation requires understanding two related jurisprudential developments: the rise and fall of the exemption doctrine and the absorption of free exercise into free speech. Starting in 1963, the Supreme Court constructed free exercise to grant religious citizens exemptions from laws and regulations that, absent an overriding compelling state interest, significantly burdened religious life. The classic exemptions case involved Amish parents' refusal to send their children to school past the eighth grade in violation of mandatory school attendance laws. In *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972) the Court ruled that though the state had a legitimate right to pass a school attendance law and though the law was facially neutral and did not target the Amish religion, the Amish had a right to an exemption from the law because it significantly burdened their religious practice. The exemption doctrine prevailed until Justice Antonin Scalia's 1990 majority opinion in *Employment Division v. Smith*. In that case, the Court rejected the appeal of members of the Native American Church who had sought an exemption from drug laws that made illegal their religious use of peyote. Reversing its earlier jurisprudence, the Court ruled that free exercise does not grant religious citizens the right to exemptions from neutral but burdensome laws. Justice Scalia went so far as to say that a presumptive right to a judicially granted exemption from a neutral law itself violates the rule of law.

Smith made clear what free exercise does not include, but it left unresolved what it does protect. If free exercise does not demand exemptions, what does it demand? In 1993, the Court had the opportunity to define its post-*Smith* conception of free exercise using two disputes that came before it. The first case, *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye, Inc. v. Hialeah*, involved a Florida city's attempt to make the practice of the Santeria religion illegal. The local city council crafted elaborate regulations that did not mention Santeria by name but clearly were intended to outlaw the religion's animal sacrifice rituals. A unanimous Supreme Court ruled that laws designed to suppress specific religious practices violate free exercise. The decision received little acclaim, in part because blatant acts of religious suppression are so rare.

The second free exercise case before the court that year, *Lamb's Chapel v. Center Moriches Union Free School District*, had a more lasting impact. Lamb's Chapel, a private religious organization, challenged a local New York school district's regulations for after-hour use of public school property. The regulations permitted social, civic, and recreational uses, but explicitly prohibited groups from using facilities for religious purposes. School officials, accordingly, rejected Lamb's Chapel's application to use school grounds to show a series of James Dobson videos on Christian family values and Christian child rearing. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of Lamb's Chapel nine to zero, but it rested its decision on the First Amendment's protection of free speech, not free exercise. The Court reasoned that the school district employed unconstitutional viewpoint discrimination when it rejected an otherwise permitted facility's use because Lamb's Chapel approached its subject matter from a religious point of view.

The victory of Lamb's Chapel encouraged other religious groups suffering from perceived religious discrimination to litigate under free speech. In 1995, a Christian newspaper at the University of Virginia successfully appealed its denial of funding. Following *Lamb's Chapel*, a five-member Court majority ruled in *Rosenberger v. University of Virginia* that the university's policy of funding all school newspapers except those published from a religious perspective constituted unconstitutional viewpoint discrimina-

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tion. In a 2002 case, *Good News Club v. Milford Central School*, six Justices found a free speech violation by a school district whose community use policy explicitly denied the use of school facilities for religious purposes.

From a results-oriented perspective, *Lamb's Chapel*, *Rosenberger*, and *Good News Club* were victories for religious freedom. In each case, the Court ruled in favor of religious citizens who were denied public funding because of their religious viewpoints. From a constitutional perspective, however, these three cases have had a devastating effect on free exercise. Aside from the rare case in which a specific religious practice is suppressed directly, religious free exercise has lost its independent value. The Court has transformed religion into a subspecies of speech. The effects of this change have been hidden because of the results the Court has reached. But should the Court reconsider what constitutes "viewpoint neutrality," an inherently ambiguous concept, legal protection of religious free exercise would all but evaporate. More fundamentally, not all exercises of religion can be classified as speech. To the extent religion is more than speech, it possesses almost no constitutional protection under current precedent.

Davey represents a unique opportunity because it reveals the contemporary crisis in free exercise jurisprudence. A creative Supreme Court might interpret Washington's confiscation of Davey's scholarship to violate his free speech rights. But to consider the reception of a state-funded scholarship a matter of speech seems to strain ordinary common sense. Davey did not lose his scholarship for anything he said. It is doubtful that he considered his decision to major in Pastoral Ministries to be an exercise of expressive activity. He lost his scholarship because he sought to study religion from a religious perspective. The state did not punish a certain type of speech; it discriminated against religion. His case, accordingly, should be decided under the Constitution's protection of religious liberty.

Given its standing establishment precedents, however, the Court cannot invoke free exercise to protect Davey from religious discrimination. The Court turned to free speech to protect free exercise in the first place because much of its establishment jurisprudence required state actors to discriminate against religion. The "Lemon" test formally required that government actions have a legitimate secular purpose, neither advance nor inhibit religion, and avoid an excessive entanglement between church and state. In practice, "Lemon" was interpreted to prohibit public money from flowing to religious schools or organizations. The Court reasoned that since money is fungible, government funding for secular purposes could be used by religious organizations for sectarian ends. Justice O'Connor's "Endorsement" test and Justice Kennedy's "Coercion" standard were meant to abate the harsh tendency of "Lemon," but in their own ways they too required state actors to be hostile toward religion. Following the logic of these precedents, many government agencies drafted policies excluding religious organizations from receiving public money or benefits. If only to avoid possible (and costly) Establishment Clause litigation, school boards and university officials adopted policies explicitly discriminating against religion.

In *Lamb's Chapel*, *Rosenberger*, and *Good News Club*, the Court's majorities lacked the will to overturn these precedents. Without confronting them directly, however, the Court could not interpret free exercise to prevent the exclusion of religious groups from public programs on account of religion. If they had interpreted free exercise to prevent religious discrimination, free exercise would have prohibited the exact same thing that no-establishment demanded. Turning to free speech allowed the Court to reach the results it desired without overturning precedent. This move, however, only masked and complicated the contradictions in the Court's First Amendment jurisprudence. Currently, free speech prohibits viewpoint discrimination based on religion. No-establishment, at least according to some standing precedents, demands such discrimination in order to prevent state funding of core religious activities. Free exercise, meanwhile, sits idly by, silently watching its warring neighbors.

With judicious decisions in *Newdow* and *Davey*, the Supreme Court could unify the First Amendment's two religion provisions into one coherent principle of religious freedom. In doing so, it could both bury those establishment precedents that are hostile toward religion and resurrect the right to free exercise. To some extent the Court already has taken small steps in this direction. In 2000, the Court allowed private religious schools to participate in a government-funded program for acquiring computer and library services. Likewise in 2002, the Court upheld the participation of private religious schools in Cleveland's school voucher program. In both cases, however, narrow Court majorities evaded, somewhat disingenuously, earlier establishment precedents. The Court did not overturn "Lemon," "Endorsement," or "Coercion," which means all three doctrines can still be employed to demand affirmative discrimination against religion.

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Overturning these precedents will require the cooperation of Justices O'Connor and Kennedy. In the past, they have been unwilling to break from their favored establishment doctrines, "Endorsement" and "Coercion" respectively. Yet the Pledge case pushes these doctrines as no prior case has before. It shows that they drive religion out of the public square; that they are neither neutral nor fair. *Newdow* also will bring with it an immense amount of public scrutiny, factors that Justices O'Connor and Kennedy have taken into account in the past. Given the nature and profile of the case, it is hard to imagine a moment when establishment jurisprudence has been more ripe for reconsideration.

If the Court can muster a majority to reconsider no-establishment, it should start by invigorating free exercise. As mentioned above, the First Amendment was drafted to protect religious liberty. Free exercise is the end; no-establishment a means. In fact, without a prior conception of free exercise it is nearly impossible to understand why religious establishment should be avoided at all.

To reformulate free exercise, the Court could do worse than turn to the writings of James Madison. Not only did Madison introduce the Bill of Rights into Congress, he has long been cited as the authoritative guide for the meaning of the First Amendment's protection of religious liberty. Madison offers a clear and simple statement, moreover, summarizing what "free exercise" means. When editing the religious freedom amendment to Virginia's state Bill of Rights, Madison proposed the following:

> That religion or the duty we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, being under the direction of reason and conviction only, not violence or compulsion, all men are equally entitled to the full and free exercise of it accord[in]g to the dictates of conscience; and therefore that no man or class of men ought, on account of religion to be invested with peculiar emoluments or privileges, nor subjected to any penalties or disabilities.

Madison interpreted "free exercise" to mean no privileges and no penalties on account of religion. This construction forbids the state from outlawing specific religious practices and forbids state discrimination on the basis of religion. If public school officials open school facilities for after-school use, they cannot single out religious groups for exclusion. Similarly, eligibility for publicly funded programs cannot be conditioned on the absence or existence of religious affiliation. If the State of Washington grants college scholarships to its best students, then it cannot exclude religious individuals who choose to major in theology.

"No privileges, no penalties" also lends itself to establishment jurisprudence. No-establishment would prohibit the state from singling out religious citizens for special legal privileges. Special tax exemptions for religious organizations alone, for example, would be disallowed (although religions could qualify for tax-exempt status as nonprofit corporations or under some other, nonreligious criterion). Legislative chaplains drawing state salaries also would be forbidden. The Founders' conception of what constitutes an impermissible religious establishment, however, did not include the public recognition of God by state officials. For the Founders, a legal privilege meant receiving material benefits or possessing special rights unavailable to the typical citizen; legal penalties meant fines or imprisonment. By prohibiting religious establishments, the Founders intended to end things like special religious taxes, religious qualifications for public office, and the enforcement of religious orthodoxy through Sabbath-breaking laws. The public recognition of God and voluntary participation in ceremonies or rites that recognize God, even if led by public officials, were never thought to be impermissible. In fact, the Founders sought to solemnize the most important public events by deliberately including religious language and appeals to divine providence in the text of their speeches and documents.

Most of the Founders believed that religious belief supported republican citizenship, and thus, although government could not make an official religious establishment, it could encourage religion in symbolic and non-compulsory ways. Unlike Justice O'Connor's "Endorsement" test and Justice Kennedy's "Coercion" standard, then, "no privileges, no penalties" would not require forays into students' psychological feelings. Judges would not need to inquire if school children feel like "insiders" or "outsiders," or if a child might perceive the state to be "endorsing" religion, which are necessarily subjective judgments. Courts would only need to ask if, on account of religion, religious citizens as such were granted a material benefit or if nonreligious citizens were subject to a penalty like a fine or imprisonment. For *Newdow*, the relevant question is: Was Michael Newdow's daughter subject to some form of disciplinary action because she would not say the Pledge? Since she was not, the Pledge stands.

The advantages of the "no privileges, no penalties" approach are numerous. First and foremost, it is capable of unifying First Amendment religion jurisprudence. No-establishment and free exercise

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can be the complementary protectors of religious liberty that the Founders intended them to be. The doctrine, moreover, is relatively simple and straightforward. School officials and local governments would no longer face a maze of contradictory rules and regulations. Disputes that do reach the judiciary could be decided more easily and transparently. Perhaps most significantly, "no privileges, no penalties" recognizes the legitimate claims of both no-establishment and free exercise litigants. The Constitution prohibits religious establishments in order to prevent a powerful religious group from legislating special legal privileges for its own members and subjecting nonmembers to particular burdens. Yet in the attempt to prohibit religious privilege, the Court saddled religion itself with particular burdens. Religious groups became the one group against whom legal discrimination was allowed. Religious citizens, in response, rightfully claimed that their right to free exercise was being trampled by extreme antiestablishment decisions. "No privilege, no penalties" prevents any type of religious discrimination, either for or against religion. It affords a robust protection for religious liberty by forbidding religion as such to be a cause for state action.

In the notorious 1947 "wall of separation" case, *Everson v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court claimed to set forth the Founders' interpretation of religious freedom. They missed the mark then and, ever since, the Court has failed to construct a historically accurate, let alone a legally coherent, interpretation of no-establishment or free exercise. The 2003-2004 term offers a unique opportunity for the Court to reconsider its past mistakes. With two decisive decisions that return to Madison's writings, the Supreme Court could reconstitute its religion jurisprudence, reinvigorating a robust protection for religious liberty. FT

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Retelling Genesis

Bette Howland

And the life of Sarah was a hundred and seven and twenty years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died in Kiriath-Arba—the same is Hebron—in the land of Canaan; and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her. And Abraham rose up from before his dead, and spoke unto the children of Heth, saying: "I am a stranger and sojourner with you; give me a possession of a burying place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." (Genesis 23:1-4)

This is a Council of Elders. The children of Heth—Hittites—are seated; Abraham, an old man, probably as white-bearded as most of us think of him, stands and bows. They all know him, "a mighty prince among us"; he can have his choice of their burying places, no one will deny him. But Abraham doesn't want their burying places; he wants one of his own, and he has just the place in mind: the cave of Machpelah, at the end of a field belonging to Ephron, son of Zoar. He'll pay "the full price." Ephron speaks up. What's this about price? He'll gladly give Abraham the field, and the cave with it: "In the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee." Again Abraham bows down. He'll pay the price; let Ephron take it. Reluctantly, since Abraham insists, Ephron gives in. "A piece of land worth four hundred shekels, what is that betwixt me and thee?"

Good. Now that's over. The protocols observed, the courtesies exchanged, the formalities out of the way. We are witnessing a ceremony of bargaining. The Children of Heth know that Abraham will turn down their offers; he's come to buy, that's why they're all here. This can't be a private transaction. Abraham has lived among them a long time, and done very well for himself; but prince or no, he's still a stranger and sojourner, and as a resident alien he can't own land without the Council's witness and consent. Ephron has named a price—a pretty stiff price; a shekel was a measure of weight, 11.5 grams; four hundred shekels would amount to 10.6 pounds of silver. The hard bargaining can begin. And we know Abraham can drive a hard bargain; we've seen him haggling with the Lord Himself.

But Abraham doesn't haggle with Ephron. He weighs out the silver, the full price, and closes the deal on the spot. The field of Machpelah, the cave therein, and all the trees within its borders, are "made sure unto Abraham for a possession."

Abraham is in no position to argue; Sarah is dead, he needs to bury her. Still, no one is trying to take advantage of him in his grief. Ephron speaks before all his kin, pronouncing "I give it thee" three times, the legal formula; and the refrain, "bury my dead/bury thy dead," sounded throughout the scene, emphasizes its somber dignity. Abraham doesn't want to lay Sarah to rest in the burying places of the Hittites for the same reason he doesn't want his son Isaac to take a wife from among them. The separateness required by the Promise; the separateness of Abraham's God.

And Abraham has to pay the full price, he has to make sure—make it legal; there must be no question of his possession. No one can say that the land was given away, or that he got it for a song. This is not a field for grazing; this is a grave. Abraham will be buried here too; and Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah. Burying rites mark the beginnings of all sacred rites, as burying places mark special rights to the land: the civilizing

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influence of the dead. From now on this is sacred ground, a claim staked historically and forever.

The field of Machpelah lies across from the terebinths of Mamre. When Abraham, then Abram, came up from Egypt, he settled near Bethel, where he had first built an altar, with his nephew Lot. The land was too meager to bear them both—a note that will be struck again—and strife broke out between their camps. To keep peace between brethren Abram proposed a parting of the ways; whichever way Lot took, he would take the other. "Is not the whole land before thee?" Lot looked toward the plain of the Jordan, well-watered "like the garden of the Lord," and headed east, as far as Sodom. We know men have ways of despoiling God's gardens. So Abram got second choice—the Lord's choice. This was the land of the Promise.

> "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward; all the land that thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever. . . ."(13:14-15)

That was when Abram moved his tent to the terebinths of Mamre and built an altar; and this is where the Lord appears to Abraham as he sits napping at his tent door in the heat of the day.

The visit, Chapter 18, falls into two parts, the announcement of the birth of Isaac and of the doom of Sodom; in other words, blessing and cursing. The first is a version of a well-known tale. The old couple living in simple harmony; the strangers with whom they share their humble fare; divinity revealed; hospitality rewarded and blessed. This, though, is the desert, famed for hospitality—the land itself being inhospitable—and Abraham goes overboard welcoming his visitors, "a little water" and "a morsel of bread" becoming a feast so lavish we suspect he's guessed Who they must be. And Who else would show up at such a time in such a place? The blessing is even more extravagant—excessive—in fact, laughable—and the Guest of Honor has words with the wife of the host.

"Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

Sarah is also laughing at herself; but what would the Lord Most High know about that?

Sarah has longed all her life for a son, an heir, though not for the sake of the Promise. As a woman her desires are more personal, like Rachel imploring Jacob, "Give me children or else I die." The Lord's first blessing is His first commandment: "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth." The heir is life and the renewal of life, generation and regeneration. The Covenant with Abraham raises the stakes: the heir is the survival of the Promise.

"Oh Lord God, what wilt Thou give me seeing I go hence childless . . . ?" What good will the Lord's blessings do Abraham, what good is the Covenant, if he's to die—go hence—without an heir? If the Lord withholds this of all blessings, the one that counts? But that's what happens. Abraham's prolonged anguish and testing—and it's not over yet; Isaac's entreaties with the Lord for Rebekah, who is barren; Jacob's outburst at Rachel in anger and frustration: "Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?"

Blessing and cursing is the work of the Lord. Nothing is too hard for Him. "When the season cometh round," Sarah will give birth to the necessary heir. This scene of desert hospitality—the feast Abraham spreads before his Guests—signifies the sacramental Covenant meal.

Abraham sees the Lord and His angels on their way, and the chapter continues in the form of a folk tale: the Little Guy who gets the better of a bargain with a Higher Up. As in a children's story or a spell, the charm of the telling relies on repetition. Abraham's insistent humility—"I have taken upon me to speak to the Lord . . . who am but dust and ashes"; and flattery—"That be far from Thee, to do after this manner. . . . Oh, that be far from Thee . . . "; and the inevitable litanies of bargaining, a pattern of recitation and response: "Perchance there will be forty found there." "I will not do it for the forty's sake." The relationship here, however, is not that of buyer and seller. This is a faithful steward and a Landlord Who sometimes mismanages His estates.

On the sixth day the Lord made man and woman in loco parentis—"in His own image"—to be overseer of all living creatures, "and, behold, it was very good." We know the rest. By the Flood things have come to such a pass that the Lord sets the rainbow in the sky to remind Himself not to forget Himself. He cursed the ground for Adam's sake; His covenant with Noah is a pledge never to curse the earth for man's sake again.

And so it goes—until Abraham. It's as if the Lord suddenly remembers. The Covenant with Abraham is a Covenant of Blessing. Abraham will teach his children "to keep the way of the Lord, and do righteousness and justice," and "all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him." From now on there is a choice, and the choice will reverberate throughout the Five Books of Moses:

> "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that thou mayest live. . . ." (Deuteronomy 30:19)

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Abraham has chosen blessing.

"Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"

A sore spot with God, ever since the Flood. Maybe the Lord hasn't considered how His ways might appear, what His justice might mean, from the point of view of mortal man, creature of but dust and ashes. Maybe He dwells too much on evil, "the imagination of man's heart," and too little on the righteous and innocent, over whom He has more influence and might set an example:

"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justly?"

The question asked in every generation ever since.

It could be that God gets more than He bargained for in Abraham, who stands before Him in His own image to plead the case for mercy and justice. Abraham knows he's stuck his neck out. In the last words of the chapter the Lord goes on His way, "and Abraham returned unto his place."

Does God have a reserve price? Does He know He won't find ten righteous souls in Sodom?

Wickedness at the time of the Flood is characterized in the most general terms: "And the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence." The wickedness of Sodom is dramatized—swiftly, and with a vengeance. This too is a scene of hospitality, though Lot greets the strangers at the gate with almost desperate solicitousness, falling "down on his face to the earth," prostrating himself, and when they demur, "he urged them greatly." The strangers may be angels, but this is no fairy tale. Word spreads through the town, and by nightfall the men of Sodom—all of them, every last one—besiege Lot's house, demanding his guests for themselves. Lot tries to bargain, offering his own daughters instead of the strangers, who "are come under the shadow of my roof." Once a stranger here himself, he's holding up to the men of Sodom their desert code of hospitality—a point not lost on them, though the irony is. "This fellow came in to sojourn, and he must needs play the judge." They are indeed being judged. In the morning Abraham will look toward the plain of the Jordan and see the smoke of Sodom.

Abraham can look at burning Sodom; Lot's wife is turned into a pillar of salt. Punishment for looking back on the nether world is a common motif, and Sodom, consumed in fire and brimstone, is a model of that world. But why a pillar? Memorial stones, or witness pillars, testified to pacts between man and man and oaths before God. But other, wooden, pillars stood for strange gods and goddesses abhorrent to the Lord Most High. "Neither shalt thou set thee up a pillar, which the Lord hateth"(Deuteronomy 16:21). Could Lot's wife have been a worshiper of pillars? Her punishment, then, would fit the crime. In any case this is a cautionary tale, and she bears witness to the sins of Sodom.

The aftermath of the destruction parallels, even parodies, the aftermath of the Flood. Holed up in a cave in the mountains with their father, Lot's daughters—the same he offered to the mob—conclude that they are alone on all the earth, and for all intents and purposes, he is the last man. They take matters into their own hands. They get him drunk, like Noah; like Noah's son Ham, they shame him. And they obey the Lord's commandment, repeated after the Flood: "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth."

This is not the first time Lot's choice of God's garden proves luckless. Soon after parting from Abram, he's kidnapped in a war of "four kings against the five," Mesopotamian warlords and their vassal states, the cities of the Plains. Learning of his nephew's plight, Abram gathers his forces, 318 "trained men, born in his house," routs the invaders, and rescues the captives with their goods and stores. The Patriarch as Warrior: an unfamiliar picture, though it might help to explain how Abram manages to hold his own here. Still, the customs of the country are not his; he scorns the King of Sodom's offer to take only "the persons" and let Abram keep "the goods." As if he's gone to battle for the spoils! He's sworn to his God, the Lord Most High, "that I will not take a thread or a shoe-latchet nor aught that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich." This sounds more like the Abraham we know, the Abraham who must pay the full price.

Abraham's bargaining with the children of Heth occurs in a setting of utmost civility—dignity, courtesy, mutual respect. These tales of Sodom, of corruption and violence, demonstrate the need for such civility. The desert is a stark and hostile place. What is not granted by favor may be taken by force. The fabled hospitality, the elaborate gift giving, the obeisances and honorifics—"my lord," "to find favor in thy sight," "bowing down to the ground"—are rituals of propitiation. Between strangers, outside the bond of blood, there is no Law; only pacts, oaths, covenants, codes—negotiation and renegotiation; the parties circling around, feeling each other out, gauging intentions, estimating costs. The shekel is the measure of money; bargaining is the prototype of all other exchange. The civility of the desert is a truce.

The Lord Most High is the Creator of life; fruitfulness is His blessing, barrenness His curse. Yet He casts Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, with its trees of every kind, and the Tree of Life; He sends Abraham away from Haran in the fertile crescent,

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watered by rivers that flow from Eden; He destroys the cities of the plain of the Jordan, once a vision of God's gardens. He could have chosen any place He wanted—was not all the land before Him?—and He chose this. A land cursed by barrenness and blessed by the Promise.

The Promise belongs to the future, which means that it's always in danger, always at stake. By the third generation, it's come to this: a hairy man and a smooth man. Brothers, twins, and diametrical.

> And the first came forth ruddy, all over like a hairy mantle; and they called his name Esau. And after that came forth his brother and his hand had hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob. . . . And the boys grew; and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. (Genesis 25-27)

Esau's hairy mantle is the sign of his nature: "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field that the Lord hath blessed. . . . " Isaac is sniffing Esau's "choicest garments"—worn by Jacob. Smoothness has its own connotations.

The brothers speak face to face only twice, and these two meetings, twenty years apart, reveal the changes in their relations and the growth in their characters. Both are scenes of bargaining. The first is brief: each gets what he wants; Jacob gets the birthright, and Esau gets the stew. How many times has Esau come home from the hunt in just such a mood, dog-tired—"faint"—demanding food? Picture him pointing: "some of that red, red pottage." This time Jacob is ready for him, and he means to make sure. "Swear to me first." Esau swears. Why not? What's he got to lose? He's dying of hunger. It seems that Isaac's boys have not grown up.

When Esau learns that Isaac has given Jacob his blessing—"yea, and he shall be blessed"—he utters "an exceeding great and bitter cry" and begins to weep.

> "Bless me, even me also, O my father. . . . Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me? . . . Hast thou but one blessing, my father. . . . Bless me, even me also, O my father. . . . "(27:34-36)

Bless/blessed/blessing. Our sympathies here have to be with Esau, presenting himself so proudly, so hopefully for the reward which by rights is his. Yet the very repetition of the word suggests that, like birthright, blessing has little meaning for Esau; it's only a word. What we are hearing is the plaintive cry of a child pleading for lost favor—as if Jacob has stolen Isaac's love.

Isaac's fondness for venison seems to trivialize him, yet the Lord Himself favors the "sweet savor" of flesh and "the fat thereof." Food is not trivial in Genesis. It sets the scene for both birthright and blessing, and the storyteller lets us know that Jacob gives Esau bread with his stew, as Rebecca bakes bread for Isaac, invoking the symbolism of the Covenant meal.

Standing between Abraham and Jacob, Isaac cuts a lackluster figure, and considering his history his passive nature is no wonder. He's obedient to his father: "But where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"; he's strongly attached to his mother. He exists for the sake of the Promise, and both parents see to it that he has no rivals—Sarah sending Ishmael away with Hagar; Abraham banishing the sons of his second alliance "away from Isaac, eastward." Isaac never leaves the land. Orthodox Jews call the son the Pray-er, the one who will say Kaddish for his parents after their deaths. In this sense, Isaac is the Promise; and if parts of his story seem recycled from his father's, what's a tale of generations but a tale of recycling?

> And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father. (26:18)

This is an act of homage and reclamation. Philistines stopped up the wells and filled them with earth when Abraham died.

In the episode at the heart of his story Isaac is not present. Rebekah is the one who appears in answer to the servant's prayer; Rebekah, running up and down with her jar on her shoulder, watering his ten thirsty camels; Rebekah, like Abraham, setting forth at once and without hesitation for an unknown destiny; Rebekah, recognizing Isaac at first sight as she alights from her camel and lowers her veil: "What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us?" Rebekah, who is always in action, and who always knows when she must act. Rebekah is the keeper of the Promise.

And what is Rebekah to do? The Lord tells her which brother is which, "and the elder shall serve the younger." The blessing is meant for Jacob. When he questions her scheme—what if this deception should backfire?—Rebekah is busy as usual, too busy to think about it. "Upon me be thy curse, my son." Spoken like a true Jewish mother.

But the Promise is still in danger.

"The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob."

This begins to sound like Cain and Abel. Rivalry between brothers is a central theme of Genesis, fueled

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always by favoritism and preference for the second-born. Why does God respect Abel's offering and not Cain's? Why does Isaac prophesy that a brother will lord it over his brothers? Why must blessing include cursing? Such contention is said to reflect political and geographical dispositions among tribes vying for ascendancy in the ancient land. But Genesis is a narrative, and its historical and spiritual truths are authenticated in the actions and characters of men and women of flesh and blood, dust and ashes. Over the centuries, over the millennia, few readers can have found much to puzzle over in a father's preference for a heedless, rough and ready son, or a mother's for a smooth and quiet one.

Rebekah warns Jacob to make himself scarce—"flee" to her brother Laban's house "and tarry with him a few days"—until Esau cools off and forgets the whole thing.

"Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?" (27:22)

Both? Who does she mean? Isaac, supposedly on his deathbed? Esau intends to kill Jacob when Isaac dies. Or Esau? Both brothers? There's no reason to believe that Esau knows of his mother's part in the theft of his blessing; the trouble is, Rebekah knows. The wrong she has done her son must forever estrange them. And Rebekah does lose both: Jacob will "tarry" with Laban twenty years. She has taken upon herself the curse of the blessing.

Well, which would you choose for a long-term proposition like the Promise? Esau, who takes no thought for the morrow? Or Jacob, who seems to think of nothing but? Esau has already disqualified himself for the family business. Not only has he "despised his birthright," he's married two Canaanite women—"a bitterness of spirit unto Isaac and to Rebekah." At Rebekah's instigation, Isaac again blesses Jacob, this time in his own right, and sends him off to Paddan-Aram to seek a wife from among his own kin: "Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan." Esau begins to catch on. His parents don't like his wives! To regain lost favor, to make amends, he decides that he too will take a wife from among kin. He marries a daughter of Ishmael.

God has blessed Ishmael, as He promised Abraham He would; but this is not the Promise of which we speak. The God of Abraham and Isaac is not just another god among many gods, little toy idols of clay, wood, or stone; gods made in the image of man. He is the One God, the Living and Law-Giving God, Who made man in His image, to keep His way. The Promise comes with a price.

The birthright is the prerogative of the eldest son. Under Mosaic Law it would confer a double portion of the father's inheritance. "The right of the first-born is his"(Deuteronomy 21:17). Someone is sticking up at last for the oft-slighted first-born. In the days of the Patriarchs it meant less and more, the father's position as head of the lineage; in the house/clan/tribe ordering of desert society, bonds based on kinship and blood, a power at least as decisive as property.

The birthright, it seems, could be bought and sold. The words of the Blessing, once spoken, could never be taken back. Blessing derives from God. It includes promise, it includes prophecy, but above all the blessing is a blessing on life.

> "God give thee of the dew of heaven
> And of the fat places of the earth
> And plenty of corn and wine. . . ."(Genesis 27:28)

However he may have acquired them—deviously and also by default—Jacob has come into possession of both. Now it will be up to him to earn them.

It's quite a hike from Hebron to Paddan-Aram, in the tableland south of Haran, where Abraham started out with his wife and nephew and all the souls and substance in his possession. Jacob sets out alone, with no more than the staff he holds in his hand. And yet not alone: no sooner does his journey begin than he too hears the Call. God speaks to Abraham—on the most intimate terms; God speaks to Isaac; when God speaks to Jacob He speaks through a dream, and His voice seems to come from within. He repeats the words of the Promise, the stump speech He's delivered so often before. For Jacob the message is immediate. "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." This is an experience of awe.

The ladder of Jacob's dream does not represent a moral summit, to be climbed rung by rung to the top. The angels are ascending and descending, and God stands right beside him. As the stones at the site indicate, this is a sacred place, a place of communion between heaven and earth, and through his dream Jacob recognizes its powers. Like his son Joseph, Jacob is a dreamer and an interpreter of dreams. Joseph's dreams are riddles or allegories, keys to the future. Jacob's dreams—this night in Bethel, in the dream-like sequel at Peniel—are symbolic and sacred, ever-expanding in meaning. In their darkness and mystery his encounters with God reveal the aspirations and struggles of his inner life—shadowed always by his relations with Esau.

Jacob meets the Promise characteristically. "If God will be with me," if the Lord will see him through this and bring him home to his father's house in peace, "then shall the Lord be my God." This is a vow with a

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contingency clause, an If-Then proposition. Jacob is putting in a good word for himself; already he's negotiating his return. That will take a while. His journey is an errand, a quest, a bildungsroman, and—let's not forget—a flight. He's fleeing the face of his brother, and he'll have to see it first. Like Abraham, he leaves his country and his father's house; like Abraham, he becomes a stranger and sojourner. We should bear in mind that he's reversing Abraham's steps.

This is a tale told in reversals, the tables turned again and again. The rivalry between Esau and Jacob becomes rivalry between Leah and Rachel; a brother disguised as a brother becomes a sister passed off as a sister; the son who deceives his father becomes a son-in-law deceived; bargaining over the birthright becomes bargaining over the marriage bed; the theft of a father's blessing becomes the theft of his household idols. And Jacob, who bests his kin, his own twin, twice over with guile, will be outmaneuvered and outdone ten times over by his wilier double-dealing uncle.

Surely the Lord is in this place—whether we know it or not.

The pattern begins at the beginning. Rebekah—who will become the boss—waters the camels of Abraham's servant; Jacob—who will become a servant—waters the master's flocks. The servant arrives with fanfare, bearing glad tidings and precious gifts of silver and gold; Jacob turns up at his uncle's door empty-handed, without gifts, without prospects, without a shekel to his name, and on top of all mooning over Rachel. Laban knows a mark when he sees one.

Laban is a folk figure, the Trickster, who lives by his wits and by outwitting, and he always gets the better of a bargain. Under pretext of fairness—why should Jacob serve him for nothing, just because they're brothers?—Laban asks Jacob to name his wages. It doesn't matter, he's not planning to pay, not the full price, and Jacob plays straight into his hands. He'll pledge to serve Laban seven years for the promise of Rachel. Almost with a shrug—better a relation, if a poor one, than an outsider—Laban agrees. Jacob's education is about to begin, and he'll need all his wits about him. What could be trickier than a promise?

Jacob is Laban's nephew and will become his son-in-law—twice; but in contrast to Abraham's exemplary conduct with his nephew, the feckless Lot, Laban is not taking Jacob under his wing. They are on the footing of master and servant, and Jacob enters Laban's household as a mere hired hand. In breaking the bond of blood, where blood is the one bond of trust, Laban is committing a serious offense. What's more, he's making a mistake. In his eagerness, greenness, the ardor of his youth, Jacob brings Laban the news from home; how likely is it he ever makes mention of savory game or lentil stew? Laban doesn't know he's taking on an apprentice, and one who will at last outwit his master. Not that Jacob is shrewder or craftier than Laban—Laban, crafty to the core, a horse trader dealing in sheep and goats and daughters. Laban is on his own, serving himself. He won't find out until the end of their story, when the Lord warns him not to meddle with Jacob, that Jacob has Connections. His apprenticeship has not been served only for Laban.

In his years with Laban, Jacob will learn all about false promises and bad bargains. He'll learn all about husbandry and breeding—in more than one sense. He'll make Laban rich, increasing his stock in herds and flocks, and, in obedience to the commandment to be fruitful and multiply, he'll increase his own stock in sons. And he will learn patience, an absolute requirement for the Promise.

> And Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had for her. (29:20)

As Laban's servant, Jacob can't leave without his master's permission, but that's not what he's waiting for. At last he gets his marching orders, his *Lekh Lekha!*—Get going!

> "Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred. . . . Get thee out of this land, and return unto the land of thy nativity." (31:3, 13)

The reversal is complete. Abraham's was a journey of departure; Jacob's is a journey of return.

He pours forth his grievances to his two wives. If not for his resourcefulness, under God's guidance, in the matter of the streaked, speckled, and spotted goats, he'd be leaving as empty-handed as he came. "Your father hath mocked me and changed my wages ten times." An unfortunate reference to the switched sister-brides, still smarting from grievances of their own. "Are we not accounted by him strangers? For he hath sold us, and hath also quite devoured our price." Poor Laban! He will pursue Jacob and his household into the desert, and there they will set up a witness pillar to the treaty and boundaries forevermore between them.

Echoing as it does so much of the family history—rivalry between brothers, preference for the younger, the curse of barren wives—the enmity between Rachel and Leah becomes a competition to produce sons and heirs, and both enlist their handmaids in the contest. Whereas, for all their pleas and prayers, Abraham and Isaac barely manage each to eke out an heir, Jacob—

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thanks to his warring wives—succeeds in fathering at last a number of sons sufficient to ensure the survival of his people; the survival of the Promise. Laban's double-dealing creates the situation, but, like "the secret things," the irony belongs to the Lord.

The years with Laban have been so eventful, so diverting—the story has taken so many twists and turns; there have been so many tricks, so many subplots, so many parallels and reversals; Laban himself has been such an entertaining character, of a novelistic vitality and authority—we might almost have forgotten. Jacob hasn't. He knows he has unfinished business.

Jacob sends messengers to Esau "that I may find favor in thy sight." They bring back word that Esau is on his way, "and with him four hundred men"; a welcome more enthusiastic than Jacob might have wished. There isn't much he can do but he does what he can; he divides his camp in case of attack; he sends gifts on ahead to Esau, literally in droves—goats, sheep, camels, cattle, asses, male and female, a veritable ark—"that I may appease him." And he asks for help:

"Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau."

An uncanny reminder: "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau" (27:22).

The night before their meeting Jacob sees his family and his goods across the ford of the Jabbok, a tributary of the Jordan. He himself stays behind. Rivers are natural boundary-lines, especially in a land like this; maybe he's not ready to cross it yet. Maybe he's not allowed. Again the storyteller delays the climax, stretching out the suspense through one more long night. "And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day" (32:25).

The man doesn't go into explanations, and Jacob doesn't ask. They struggle in darkness and silence until, seeing that the match is a draw and the sky is beginning to grow light, the man wounds Jacob, by some sleight-of-hand or magic, to make him let go. Jacob holds on, he was born holding on, and he knows Who it is he's got hold of now: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

This is no dream; the wound is real. The "man" identifies himself by not identifying Himself. At Bethel God was the protector and provider; here He shows a primordial face. The river is the sign of the primal world, and many elements of Jacob's story recall Shamanic ritual. Those hairy skins on his hands and "the smooth of his neck" in his animal disguise as his brother; his trick of sympathetic magic with the grizzled goats; his dreams, his journey, his vision-quest. In this final trial, waged in darkness and danger, he wrests at last Shamanic transformation.

In Genesis, the ritual of transformation is itself transformed.

The God of Abraham and Isaac is the God of the Covenant, and His blessing now takes that form. Like Abram/Abraham in the covenant of circumcision, Jacob/Israel wins a new name, a spiritual sign; and like Abraham he receives, "as a token," a sign in the flesh. He will limp upon his thigh. Jacob has bargained for his blessing. He has striven "with God and with men" and has prevailed. Has Jacob striven with Jacob? If so, who has prevailed?

Jacob sees them coming from a long way off, Esau and his four hundred men. He arranges his family behind him with his usual priorities; the handmaids with their children first; Leah and hers after them; Rachel and Joseph "hindermost." And he goes out to meet his brother, "bowing himself to the ground seven times." Probably, like Lot, he's prostrating himself, falling on his face to the earth.

> And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept. (33:4)

And who wouldn't weep? Though surely Jacob's tears spring in part from relief.

The reunion begins like any other. Esau asks to meet the family: "Who are these with thee?" and we get a pretty picture of the handmaids and wives, each with her children, coming forward to take a bow. Next Esau asks about the gifts: "What meanest thou by all this camp which I met?" Jacob replies, all deference: "to find favor in the sight of my lord." In words of forgiveness, repleteness, disarming simplicity, Esau declines these offerings. "I have enough."

Jacob won't take no for an answer. Always the most talkative of the clan, in his agitation and excitement and heady relief, he insists, he all but gushes; pressing Esau to accept his gifts, his gratitude, "forasmuch as I have seen thy face, as one seeth the face of God." And, he adds, "because I have enough."

Jacob has indeed seen the face of God, only the night before, and he's glad—and more than a little surprised—that he's still alive. And his repetition of Esau's words, "I have enough," should alert us: this is no more than a stock phrase, a formulaic courtesy, the coin of the realm. Once again we are witnessing a ritual of negotiation in the desert. Esau takes the gifts.

Esau has to take the gifts; he knows very well what they mean. Refusal would signify hostility—which is why Jacob is being so persistent. By accepting the gifts, Esau accepts Jacob's repentance and supplication. He is

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appeased. And he wastes no time signaling that the parley is over.

"Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before thee."

Now what? What does this mean? Is it a threat or a promise?

Jacob doesn't ask Esau what he means by marching to meet him with four hundred men. All this time, Jacob is standing in front of a small band of women and children, their sole protector; Esau is standing at the head of an army. Jacob isn't home yet. Who knows what might happen out there in the wilderness of desert? Is he to return to the land of his nativity in the wake of Esau's dust? At best, this offer will mean a forced march. Esau with all his hosts can travel faster than Jacob with all his domestic encumbrances; "his two wives and his two handmaids and his eleven children," his goats, sheep, camels, cattle, and asses. Esau has wives, three of them at least that we know of; why hasn't he brought them along with him to this family reunion?

Jacob pleads his own slow pace. "The children are tender, and the flocks and herds giving suck. . . . " For their sake, he must "journey on gently," and meet up with his brother later in Seir.

Esau tries again. How about leaving only "some of his folk"? Again Jacob begs off, with all due obsequies: "Let me find favor in the sight of my lord."

Esau has made his point; he heads home to Seir. Jacob takes a detour toward Shechem instead. The reunion between brothers ends in a truce, the wary peace of the desert.

Esau has come to assess the situation, ready for whatever it might bring. He sees that his brother is no threat to him. He sees the gifts, the flocks and herds; he sees the family, women and children; he sees Jacob's anxiety and fear. Though his brother is no coward. Jacob steps forth to meet him halfway, alone, before an army, halting and limping and bowing down to the ground. Isaac's blessing prophesied that Esau would bow down before Jacob; but no, here is Jacob, bowing down before Esau. It is enough.

Because it's true: they have enough. Both brothers have been blessed. Isaac's boys have grown up, fulfilling the promise of their natures. And each has needed this meeting, to forgive and be forgiven, for that completeness. They are brothers. If their reunion is not all love and kisses, if Esau's greeting is not as open-armed and all-embracing as at first appears, he gains in other ways. He's not one to get the worst of a bargain now; nobody will boast the advantage over him again. We've seen him cry once before, like a child hurt and pleading; now he's a leader, a cunning hunter, a man of the field; strong enough to show strong emotion, not ashamed, before all his followers, to weep and to forgive. He too has had an education; he's learned the ways of the desert, and of men.

Together Esau and Jacob will bury Isaac, as Ishmael and Isaac buried their father before them. In time—"their substance was too great for them to dwell together"—Esau will move to the mountains; Jacob will stay with the land. Jacob has seen the face of God, he's seen his brother's face, and it's possible now to see his face. There have been so many Jacobs. He's a quiet man, a dweller in tents; a man of many anxieties and worries for all the lives and creatures dependent on him, entrusted to his care. A steward. By his abundance he has ensured the future of the Promise. And yet, in the years ahead, as his sons grow older, as his tribe increases, his worries can only increase. The rape of Dinah. The slaughter of the sons of Shechem. Rachel dying in childbirth "in the way to Ephrath." Reuben, his first-born, lying in defiance with his father's concubine. His favorite son, Joseph, like a lamb stolen from the fold, torn by wild beasts. His old age brought down in sorrow. And in spite of the happy ending, he knows better; there will be more to this long story, and sorrows enough to come. "Swear to me first," Jacob demands of Esau. "Swear unto me," he pledges Joseph: "Bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt." Two oaths, two Jacobs, and all the tale between. Abraham is the Patriarch from the beginning, always the honorable, upright, white-bearded old man; Isaac inherits the role; Jacob becomes the Patriarch. The Jacob cycle is a life cycle, from birth to death, from exile to return.

> "I am to be gathered unto my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a burying place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave that is therein, which was purchased from the children of Heth." (49:29-32)

Stories are meant to be told and retold. FT

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Coincidence & Conversion

Alicia Chesser

When you grow up in a place like Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, seeing a Polish Capuchin monk is a bit like seeing the Sasquatch—an exotic, rare, somewhat terrifying being whose habits are both foreign and fascinating. If you're a nondenominational Protestant whose main experience of men of the cloth comes from camp meetings, Bible studies, and altar calls, the sight is even stranger.

I don't think I had ever seen a Catholic priest in person when, in eleventh grade, I saw Father Norbert—wearing a coarse brown robe and sandals, carrying a tattered Bible—walk past the door of my European history classroom. Older friends who'd heard him lecture in our school said his name in the same hushed tone they used for rock bands like Depeche Mode or U2. This guy in the robe? He was cool. There were a few other priests like him, I'd heard, at St. Anne's parish down the street, men who lived in community and wore ropes around their waists and preached long, difficult sermons. I'd even heard that one of them grew bitter herbs in his garden, which he ate throughout the year as a sort of mortification. A few of the smartest guys in our high school would meet with Fr. Norbert from time to time to discuss the work of someone named Thomas Aquinas. They'd talk with him for hours, then go out and mow the grass around the church. It sounded pretty cool, in its way.

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In fact, it sounded more than cool. It sounded like these people understood something different about God than I had ever understood, like they lived in God in a way I never had. And I was ready to live in God again. I just had no idea how to start.

As is often the way with brainy, moody teenagers, I had come to believe in the gospel according to Jack Kerouac, Dizzy Gillespie, and a hodgepodge of Japanese poets, absurdist playwrights, and existentialist philosophers whose works I'd found on adjacent shelves on the second floor of the public library. My mother worried that such devotion to these notorious hedonists, depressives, and live-fast-die-young types would lead me to drugs or worse, but there was little risk of that. Mine had to be a fairly ascetical Beat Generationism, since my real religion was the daily discipline of ballet. I had studied dance seriously since the age of five, and by junior high it consumed nearly twenty hours of my time per week, sometimes more during the performance season of the Tulsa Ballet, with which I danced as a member of the corps de ballet. I worked hard, both in and out of school, and my desire to do well at everything shielded me from the profligate influences of my extracurricular reading. But something else was shielding me, too.

My parents and I had not been members of a church for a long time. Our excuse was that, because of my demanding schedule and that of my father, who owned his own remodeling business, we simply didn't have time. The deeper reason, I think, was that we had not found a denomination we could call home. My father, Wayne Mosier, raised Lutheran, and my mother, Suzanne, raised Presbyterian, had been born again shortly before I was born. Deeply involved in the charismatic revival that swept the midwest in the

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late 1970s, they moved from Nebraska to Oklahoma to be part of the burgeoning "Faith Movement." While still in Nebraska, we traveled to nursing homes and community centers singing gospel songs, with mom at the piano and three-year-old me taking the harmony part. We went to revivals, where people beyond number would "go out under the power," falling to the floor under what seemed to be the influence of the Holy Spirit. We read the Bible constantly.

And there were miracles. One afternoon, when I was about four, I came into the kitchen to find mom sitting immobile at the table, in the grip of what she would later describe as "a black cloud, a satanic fog." I began to speak in tongues, and the cloud disappeared, as did the anorexia from which she had suffered for years. At a healing service around the same time, our minister laid his hands on my left leg, which curved in at the ankle and required me to wear a special heavy shoe, and as he prayed I watched my leg straighten out before my eyes. Being a dancer would never have been possible without that healing. Most of all, we prayed as a family, whenever there was something that needed praying about. We prayed in the words of St. Paul: we were washed in the blood of the Lamb, putting on the armor of Christ, treading on serpents and scorpions, believing that we might receive. We laid hands on each other and agreed that by his stripes we were healed. Jesus was as much a part of our family as any of us; in fact, he was its center, since everything that happened to us came from him.

Before long, though, my parents became concerned about what they were seeing in the charismatic movement. The churches in which we worshiped kept breaking into factions over everything from doctrine to finances. Members could not agree on what to preach, how to pray, how to interpret Scripture rightly, and finally there would be a split, usually a bitter one. But that wasn't the worst of it. The "faith message" said that you could have anything you wanted—even a new car or a bigger salary—if only you believed enough. When our friend Greg got pneumonia, he was urged not to see a doctor but rather simply to declare himself healed. If he had enough faith, the church said, his health would be restored; going to a doctor would demonstrate, in fact, a lack of faith. Greg died soon thereafter, a martyr to what my parents began to see as an increasingly suspect and even blasphemous gospel.

Shaken and disillusioned, my parents abandoned the charismatic church, and during my later elementary school years we shuttled between Lutheran and Methodist churches, finally settling for prayer at home as schedules grew busier and church worship less fulfilling. "Settling" is the wrong word, perhaps, for my parents continued to be deeply devout, and we prayed together about everything; however, our lack of a faith community affected all of us. We had questions about the faith, but there was no one to answer them. I simply stopped asking. While I never stopped believing in God, He became for me just someone to talk to, someone whose help and guidance I took for granted—more a school counselor than the Alpha and Omega.

It was around this time, age fourteen or fifteen, that I began to be attracted to the writers and thinkers who described the world as a fundamentally meaningless, if more or less benign, place. I read up on Buddhism, finding its depiction of "nothingness" appealing. A common thread throughout these writings—existentialist, Buddhist, and "beat" alike—was that joy was possible despite the absence of a source for that joy, that good could be done even though no such thing as "the good" existed. I wanted to believe it. I wanted to love life, but I didn't want God interfering to tell me how or what to love. It would soon become clear that what I wanted was, very simply, a lie.

One summer afternoon, my two closest friends came to my house to tell me that our friend Rachel—the free spirit of our group, the smartest and funniest and most creative person we knew, though also the most troubled—had driven her car far out onto a rural road, climbed a hill, and shot herself in the mouth.

None of us knew how to handle this: the shock of her death, the way it happened, the loss, even how to relate to each other now. At her memorial service, which we all knew she would have hated, the minister had no idea who she was, and there were prayers in the service at which, in her sly way, she would have smirked. But as we prayed the Our Father that day, tears came to my eyes, not just for Rachel but for the emptiness that was in all our hearts. For many in our group of friends, whose homes were broken or filled with abuse and sadness, who had not grown up in the Church, the very idea of a loving Father was an absurdity. I knew that He existed, that He loved me. I grieved that Rachel hadn't lived to know it. Nothingness was now very concrete to me and my friends. It wasn't freedom. It was hell.

Truth, trust, community: much later John Paul II's trinomial would teach me what was missing. True community can't exist without trust, which in turn can't exist without a foundation in the truth. That trinomial's mirror image—untruth, fear, solitude—was the very definition of my experience in those years. I didn't know where to go, how to get out, how to return to a life that had . . . life. Suddenly, though, a path began to break.

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My advanced placement English class had me reading stories and novels by that brilliant Catholic apostate, James Joyce. They were full of words I'd never heard before: chasuble, monsignor, transubstantiation. For help in understanding Joyce's points of reference I went to my friend Emily, a devout Catholic and, as it happened, a member of Fr. Norbert's parish. An after-school talk about definitions turned swiftly into a probing conversation about the Church, in which Emily described what happened during Mass. She was calm and thorough, but when she arrived at the Canon, her voice grew intense. Her eyes shone when she said: "The whole Mass culminates in what happens here, in the Eucharist, when Christ becomes present." As she explained what Catholics believed about the Eucharist, something stirred in me, as well. "Christ becomes present." I didn't know quite what that meant, or how it happened, but I knew it was him I wanted to see. Emily invited me to join her at Mass, purportedly to get a firsthand look at all those chasubles and things. The next Sunday I found myself kneeling next to her near the altar at St. Anne's.

I'd long had an amateur's interest in things Catholic. Having discovered Gregorian chants and books of icons at the library, I had wondered at the purity and variety of the liturgies and the richness of the art. Studying the aesthetics of the Church, however, had not prepared me for this experience of the Church in the flesh.

My mind was in chaos in the midst of this strange ceremony. As I knelt before the stone table, covered with an intricate lace cloth, and gazed at the mother-of-pearl icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa and the huge gold tabernacle—while Fr. Norbert sang the antiphons and censed the sanctuary—I felt as though I was moving about in a dark room where strange figures brushed up against my shoulders, and strange voices guided me along. I was lost, but not afraid, and when the bell rang after the words of consecration—when I looked up to see Fr. Norbert holding the white Host above his head—I wasn't even lost. It was Jesus. And I was home.

After Mass, Emily introduced me to Fr. Norbert. He grasped my hand and looked into my eyes, and I felt the Holy Spirit's power coming into my heart. It was the same steady, physically palpable force I had felt when that preacher laid his hands on my leg so many years before. Before long, I told him that I would like to enter the Catholic Church. "Well, come and see," he said with a gentle smile, and he told me to be at the religious education building on a Tuesday night a few weeks later, when RCIA classes would begin.

Like many Protestants of their generation, my parents had been raised with a mild form of anti-Catholicism; they weren't allowed to date Catholics, for instance, and as kids they heard the usual warnings about statue-worship. My dad had a strong religious formation in his youth, and he held firmly Lutheran views on things such as the priesthood of all believers and salvation by grace through faith. Neither he nor mom, however, had ever expressed any antipathy toward the Church, so I was fairly sure they wouldn't react negatively when I began to visit St. Anne's. To be honest, I didn't give much thought to how they would respond, and it was thanks to them that my decision could be made so freely. I knew they were confident I had absorbed what they had taught me about listening to the Lord, testing the spirits, and praying to be in God's will.

It was clear that they trusted me to do that, even if the Church was strange to them. They never raised an eyebrow, at least around me. In fact, their comments when I would leave the house on Sunday mornings were amazingly nonchalant: "Oh, have a good time!" "Say 'hi' to Emily!" They weren't sure what it was all about, but they saw that something was happening to me in that parish down the street. Mom said: "You have a different look when you come home from there. A good look. Peaceful. I don't know why, but you're different." They asked few questions; they simply let me go.

They were actually more surprised when I told them I wanted to stop dancing. Ballet had become a sort of religion for me, an all-encompassing way of life that required a single-minded devotion I was no longer willing to give. I'd had some injuries, so the likelihood of a professional career was no longer as strong as it had once been. I wanted to go to college, which would be impossible if I continued to pursue ballet full time. But what worried me most was that dance had become my whole identity. It defined not just my schedule, but my sense of self; I hardly knew who I was without it and the recognition it brought. My ballet teacher worried that I was throwing away a God-given gift. I knew it was a gift, one which, once given up, could never be retrieved. Yet God was calling me—not as a dancer, or a student, but simply as me—and I knew this was a break I had to make. In the first few weeks of not going to ballet class, I had a sense of peace I had not felt in many years. Body and soul, it was a tremendous liberation.

Plus, it left me free in the evenings to attend Fr. Norbert's RCIA classes. There were about twenty of us: young and old, couples and singles, workers and students. We gathered once a week in a bland little room and, with somewhat cautious looks, gave ourselves to

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Fr. Norbert's care. It's no exaggeration to say that many of us were a little frightened of him. He had done his dissertation on Aquinas at the Catholic University of Lublin, John Paul II's alma mater. He spoke many languages, could read Hebrew, and quoted as easily from St. Athanasius as from the Sermon on the Mount. But it wasn't just his knowledge that made him intimidating. He had spent many years in Guatemala serving the poorest of the poor. He had lived under communism in Poland. He was a Capuchin, which meant a life of asceticism and poverty. He was young, perhaps in his early forties, but his face bore the signs of great suffering; his voice was low but forceful, especially when he preached about the culture of death. He was quite clearly a man who had intimate knowledge of the Cross.

His RCIA classes were, to put it mildly, unorthodox, and by "unorthodox" I mean (in contrast to many RCIA programs I've heard about since) very, very orthodox. Fr. Norbert had no interest in making Catholicism palatable to us. He was simply there to teach us what the Church taught, to answer our questions, and to enable us to decide whether to say "yes" or "no." He began that first night by discussing a single Latin word he had written on the blackboard: *latria*, worship. Over the next eight months, he took us through the Ten Commandments, the sacraments, the virtues, the doctrines of original sin, atonement, infallibility, the role of Mary, and on and on through the entirety of Catholic history, life, and thought. At all times, his big Jerusalem Bible sat before him on the table, more dog-eared even than the Catechism that sat beside it. These classes were overwhelming and not a little over my head, but they were also exhilarating. It was a blessing, in a way, that I came in knowing so little theology, because I was free to absorb the Church's teachings without an intellectual struggle. Some teachings didn't quite make sense to me, but that didn't worry me; they would make sense in time. The more Fr. Norbert explained how the Church understood both God and human beings, the stronger my commitment became to the "body" in which the Body of Christ had been made present on the altar. The Church had me at "hello," to paraphrase a line from the movie *Jerry Maguire*. As I began to know her more intimately—to learn what she thought, how she expressed herself, why she wore green on some days and purple on others—I grew more and more in love with her.

On Good Friday Fr. Norbert asked me to meet with him one last time before the Easter Vigil. He asked if I had any final questions. He had taught us so well that most questions about doctrine had already been answered, but one thing did come to my mind. "I'm not sure I really understand humility," I said. "I know I don't have it. How can I get it?" His response astounded me. "Humility is simply telling the truth," he said, "about yourself, about others, and about who God is." Then he asked if I had chosen a patron saint for my confirmation name. I hadn't, so he said: "Think about Thérèse, the Little Flower. I think she would be a good friend for you." Thérèse it was. And so that Saturday night, April 2, 1994, I became Alicia Thérèse, a daughter of the Church. My parents came with joy to the Vigil and sat in the front pew, where right out of the gate Fr. Norbert drenched my dad with a suspiciously well-aimed splash of holy water.

That same night at Holy Family Cathedral in Tulsa, my boyfriend, Steven Chesser, was also received into the Church. He was among that group of young men who had met with Fr. Norbert to discuss theology during high school, and he was now in his first year of studies in philosophy at the University of Tulsa.

His journey to the Church was completely independent from mine and very different. (He had many more, and more intelligent, questions about the faith than I did, for one thing.) Steve had not grown up in any church at all, though his mother, a Baptist, was and is a woman of great faith. In the summer of 1993, he and his family took a road trip through the Western states, and for the journey, I gave him copies of St. Augustine's *City of God* and *Confessions*, thinking he might find them interesting, but never imagining their dramatic influence on him. By the time he came home, he was convinced that the Church of which Augustine was part was where he wanted to be, too. Now we were together in "the Catholic thing," and even something so basic as attending Mass together brought new depth to our love.

I started at the University of Tulsa that fall, joining Steve in the philosophy department, with a second major in English. We sat on the student interview committee that would help choose a new member of the philosophy faculty, and we were thrilled one day to find ourselves interviewing Professor Russell Hittinger, an eminent natural law theorist who had taught at Fordham, Princeton, and the Catholic University of America. Professor Hittinger was hired, and in the next two years I took every course he offered, from "Aquinas' Treatise on Law" to "The Philosophy of Religion." We read Spinoza and John Dewey, James Madison and Justice Frankfurter, St. Francis and Gregory the Great. He became a treasured mentor, not only as a teacher of Catholic theology and religiously informed political thought, but also as a friend who unselfishly gave his time in conversation marked by singular shrewdness, prudence, wit, and zeal.

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In the summer of 1997, Prof. Hittinger called me up with a typically bold and unexpected idea: "You should go to Poland!" What in the world would I do that for, I wondered? He explained that every summer in Krakow the Polish Dominicans hosted a three-week seminar in which George Weigel, Michael Novak, Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, Fr. Maciej Zieba, OP, Hittinger himself, and others gave lectures on Catholic social thought to two dozen senior undergraduate and graduate students from America and Eastern Europe. In addition to the lectures, there would be discussion groups, tours of Krakow and Czestochowa and many other places, even outings to the mountains. The students would stay at the thirteenth-century Dominican priory while the brothers took a brief holiday; Mass would be said each day in the priory's chapter room. All expenses were paid except for plane fare. How could I say no? I applied, was accepted, and soon boarded a plane that would take me out of the country for the first time, and into a world that would change my life in ways I could never have expected.

The lectures at the "Tertio Millennio and Free Society Seminar" were challenging and inspiring. The setting was breathtakingly beautiful and the outings were a delight. But it wasn't the trips or the discussions that made those three weeks so powerful. It was the daily Mass—intimate and unadorned, uniting our little group in trust—and the astonishing richness of this Church-infused culture. Everything, even the poetry of an atheist or the music of a hard rock band, seemed to exist within the sensibility of the Church. For the Poles I met, there was nothing "forbidden" about the modern world; their faith, while always ready to turn away from evil, never seemed prim or defensive. In other words, they were the first "John Paul II Catholics" I'd ever encountered: they were not afraid, of modernity or of Christ, and their confidence drew all of us to them. This was a Christianity I'd never experienced before, and it was exhilarating.

It wasn't easy to come back home. For three weeks, I had been in an environment of such abundant grace, in a culture that was so thoroughly, vibrantly Christian, that returning to a world of shopping malls and artificially intimate liturgies was a real shock. Our American Church and culture seemed impoverished by comparison. The lack of a genuinely Catholic culture was almost physically painful in the first few weeks I was back.

Little did I know what waited at home. My parents had been struck by my descriptions of the Church in Poland, but perhaps just as much by how much I had changed since becoming Catholic. Soon the number of questions they were asking about Catholicism began to increase dramatically, both in number and in difficulty. I began studying my Catechism before going home on the weekends, so I'd be prepared to answer them. Every visit brought a new query from my father. There were questions about the papacy and apostolic succession, about sin and grace, about the authority of Scripture and tradition. I wanted to give the best answers I could, because I saw that something was happening in my parents, and I knew that if I stayed out of the way and just repeated what the Church said, its truth and beauty would draw them in.

My mom didn't ask as many theological questions, but something was happening in her as well. One day, a couple of months after I returned from Poland, we were sitting in the living room talking about this and that; I think I was telling her something about the saints, whom she had begun to find fascinating. Suddenly, she turned to me and said: "Would you teach me how to pray the Rosary?" Heart pounding, I wrote down the prayers and took her through the mysteries. A few weeks later she called with words that took my breath away: "I think your father and I are going to go and see about those RCIA classes up at the Cathedral." On April 10, 1999, I was blessed to sponsor my parents as the bishop laid his hands on their heads, and they were confirmed.

To say that being with my parents in the Church has been an adventure would be an understatement. Faith has been so important to our family for so long. Now that we've found what we hold to be faith in its fullness, we are closer than ever, and it is a never-ending pleasure to explore the Church with them. Despite being supplemented by some like-minded magazines, First Things continues to be the journal of choice at the Mosier house, in part because from 1998 to 2003 (thanks to a strong recommendation from Russell Hittinger) it employed the Mosier daughter on its editorial staff. Working with Fr. Neuhaus—my teacher in Krakow and boss, landlord, and friend in New York—and the wildly varied group of philosophers, theologians, priests, poets, and raconteurs who surround the magazine, was a joyous experience of the Church Catholic.

My parents got to share the experience in several visits to New York and, most dramatically, in a trip to Rome at the turn of the millennium, where they joined me at a grand reunion of the Krakow seminar alumni—and where, just eight months after entering the Church, in the Clementine room off St. Peter's Basilica, they got to meet the Holy Father. (My dad's words when greeting the Pope have become legendary in our First Things community. He knelt at the Pope's feet, took his hand, and said, "God bless

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you, heavenly father!" We've tried not to let that story get out to our Protestant family members, lest it confirm their worst suspicions about what Catholics really believe.)

There is an old French proverb which says that a coincidence is an event in which God wishes to remain anonymous. Many things in this story seem like coincidences: that I happened to get interested in James Joyce and ask my Catholic friend about chasubles; that I and my boyfriend Steve, now my husband, happened to meet the same Polish Capuchin in little Broken Arrow; that the priest who prepared us for marriage ten years later happened to be a Polish Dominican from the priory in which the Krakow seminar was held; that Prof. Russell Hittinger happened to come to Tulsa, which led me to Poland and to First Things, all of which played a part in bringing my parents into the Church.

Looking back, it does not seem that God was anonymous at all in these events. He was always there—His extravagant, exuberant grace available at every moment. My childhood experience of a personal relationship with Him opened my heart to the fullness of that relationship in the Catholic Church. In the writings and the witness of Pope John Paul II, the Church has reasserted her ancient awareness that a person stands at her center. This is not just any person, but the one who, as the Second Vatican Council put it, both reveals God to man and reveals man to himself. After all, what is at the center of the Mass but Jesus' body and blood? What is at the heart of our prayer, but the man who by his death and resurrection draws us into the conversation of the Trinity? What is the beginning of the Apostolic Succession but Peter's realization of who this Jesus actually is?

It's not too much to say that my charismatic upbringing trained my eyes to see all this. In the rituals of the Catholic Church, in the saints, in the papacy, and in the sacraments, I was able to recognize a drawing near to the person of Christ—in large part because another tradition taught me to recognize him in the first place. I continue to invoke the Holy Spirit; I rely on the Word. In the confessional, there is a powerful sense of Jesus' healing mercy and my own radical dependence on it. All of this, all learned from the faith of my parents, converges with and deepens my experience of the Church. I have traveled very far, and there is far to go. Through it all, I know Christ will keep leading me home. FT

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A Most Partial Historian

David B. Hart

Maurice Cowling (b. 1926) has never gained wide celebrity in Britain and is all but unknown beyond its shores, even though he is arguably among the twentieth century's most accomplished historians. In part, this is a neglect attributable to something indefinably elliptical in his work—his concern for topics that often excite only other scholars, perhaps, or the simultaneous subtlety and diamantine hardness of his prose—but in far greater part, I suspect, it is attributable to the unfashionable cast of his ideas. His intellectual convictions are conservative and Christian, if idiosyncratically so in both respects, and neither quality endears him to those many British academics and assorted savants to whom this can mean only that he is a dangerous reactionary. Even among the Christian intelligentsia of those isles, his importance may occasionally be acknowledged, but often with more than a little suspicion or even hostility.

Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England
Volume III: Accommodations.
By Maurice Cowling.
Cambridge University Press.
766 pp. $100.

I, for one, can attest to the latter reality. I was a postgraduate student at the Divinity School at Cambridge University in the mid-1980s, at some remove from Cowling's haunts but still within range of many of the ripples that spread from him, and while there I learned how pronounced was the distaste earnest English Christians—students and faculty alike—were capable of feeling towards whatever it was they imagined Cowling represented. Occasionally the rhetoric he inspired was positively frantic, if not slightly lunatic. No one denied his reputation for erudition, clarity of mind, and impatience with vagary—as well as for the profound influence he had on those who chose to expose themselves to his thought—but somehow this reputation was taken as something sinister. In the minds of certain of my colleagues, he seemed a kind of Klingsor in his castle, weaving unwholesome spells with which to ensnare innocent souls (an impression given added strength by the fact of his being a fellow of Peterhouse, of all the colleges the most cordially loathed, regarded by all right-thinking persons as an impregnable citadel of criminal nostalgias).

Not that any of my acquaintances had been Cowling's student or, as far as I could tell, knew him personally. The real scandal of Cowling for those of my fellow theologians who had any sense of him was not simply that he was in some undefined sense a man of the right, or even that he was by all accounts a rather severe personality, but that—in addition—he presumed to present himself as a Christian thinker. Devout and studious British Christians, after all, are as a rule creatures of the left, and there is rarely any form of social meliorism that the clergy and theologians of England are not eager to embrace, whether or not it has any of the actual effects they desire from it. But Cowling has the temerity to demur from the cozy consensus, to cast a cold eye upon the facile equation of Christian morality with sentimentality, sincerity, or

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"activism," and to do so with a power of argument that is disturbingly difficult to resist. And this is one reason, I imagine, for the relative obscurity in which his work languishes.

Which is a pity, most especially for Christian thinkers, who could profit much from an unprejudiced encounter with his work. Were they to grant him more of a hearing, they might find him to be a thinker intelligently and skeptically absorbed in vital questions, and an interpreter of Christian culture who, whatever one makes of his politics, deserves the attention of anyone concerned to understand the fate of faith in the modern age.

If the time for a proper critical appreciation of Cowling's importance is ever to come, it may as well be now. With the publication in 2001 of the third and final volume of his immense magnum opus, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England*, Cowling has completed a work of history not only in many ways sui generis, but truly magisterial. Its focus is quite rigorously limited, unquestionably, but its scope is vast: it is an attempt to gain an encompassing perspective on the transition of England's cultural consensus, over a little more than a century and a half, from that of a Christian country to that of one decidedly post-Christian, and to do so entirely by way of the literary remains of the intellectual classes.

Indeed, this last aspect of the trilogy is in a sense its governing logic and its most significant challenge to historiographical conventions. From the first, Cowling eschews all social or material history, sequesters his study from political, economic, or class theory, refuses every invitation to subordinate ideas to events, and fixes his gaze with almost ascetic intensity on the published beliefs, speculations, fantasies, convictions, and modest proposals of the caste of literati who mold the opinions and prejudices of their times. His interest is, as his title announces, "public doctrine," by which he means the entire spectrum of orthodoxies and heterodoxies propounded by the literature of popular, literary, and scholarly discourse in the public forum; today, as Cowling remarks, "reading, viewing, and reflecting are more central than prayer or worship," and so it is exclusively of texts and their authors that he chooses to write.

What this method produces, one must immediately say, is in no sense a work of impartial history. Indeed, Cowling regards such impartiality as a pretense, and views the opinionated historian as the more honest and probative practitioner of the craft. In the trilogy's first volume—which is something of an intellectual autobiography—he speaks of his desire to "describe the contours of a narrow mind" and in the final volume confesses to being "a cynical conservative who has never had the slightest enthusiasm for the rhetoric of progress, virtue, and improvement." Not that he needs to inform his readers of these things: his treatment of writers is frequently, as he freely concedes, venomous, and he is not the sort to suffer from any excessive anxiety over the prominence of his own personality within his commentary. While the range of his investigations is huge—making no distinctions among philosophers, psychologists, historians, novelists, or any other tradesmen of the written word—the range of his sympathies most emphatically is not. He is a Christian by intellectual conviction (though not necessarily, he ruefully acknowledges, by virtue of devout observance), and a conservative by philosophy and temperament, and it is only where these two currents fruitfully intersect that he is obviously at peace with his subjects.

That said, no one should mistake Cowling for a rigid dogmatist, much less for an apostle of reaction. There is not even any sense in which he could be said to cling to any particular conservative "theory." He is, in other words, a pure exemplar of H. Stuart Hughes' maxim that conservatism is "the negation of ideology." Not the sort who vests his confidence in any general political or economic principle equally applicable to—and equally abstracted from—all societies, he represents a conservatism of the concrete, historically and socially specific. One is tempted to characterize it simply as an attachment to certain traditions, memories, customs, habits of usage and association, cultural forms, and even perhaps particular landscapes; or as a belief in the organic integrity of civilization, and of the adherences upon which civilization depends, and a stern distaste for the damage done when the coherence of culture is carelessly or callously assailed. He is a royalist, naturally, a believer in the established church, a defender of worthy institutions and traditions, and is unimpressed by those who think in terms of grand designs for refashioning the social order from the top down or bottom up; but it would be imprudent to assay an account of his political "philosophy."

Most importantly, though, Cowling's conservatism is Christian—a sober fidelity to English Christian culture. He sees that the decline of Christian belief and the disintegration of the social authority of the state-church accommodation have been ruinous to "the historic English personality" and have "flooded the providential causeway which divides dignity and cosmic confidence from hopelessness, boredom, and despair." And since this is the moral concern with which his history is engaged, his intellectual alliances and enmities are not necessarily at the beck of his personal loyalties and aversions. When, at the end of his history, he lists the figures he

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has discussed for whom "the reader will detect anything resembling sympathy," he does not simply name fellow conservatives. He mentions, for instance, the resolutely socialist theologian John Milbank because Milbank is so blithely uncompromising an enemy of modernity, as unwilling as Cowling to grant secularity any of the intellectual, moral, or historical claims it makes for itself. At the same time Roger Scruton, whom an inattentive reader might expect to appear in the same company, is excluded from it, and is treated earlier in the text as, in some sense, an accomplice of that "post-Christian consensus" upon which Cowling's trilogy pronounces so damning a verdict.

That verdict, incidentally, is one not so much of apostasy as of heresy. It may be the case, Cowling believes, that the Christian epoch has descended deep into its twilight and that when the sun rises again it will be—at least in England—upon a world evacuated of transcendence, but he refuses to concede that this is a result of natural necessity, advances in cultural rationality, social progress, or (certainly) "enlightenment." In fact, Cowling treats belief in progress as itself little more than a sordid superstition, and he excels at exposing the secret little fideisms (many of them parasitic on religious habits of speech and thought) that inform the minds of "advanced" thinkers and the rhetoric of triumphalist secularism. Religion cannot be escaped, he argues, even if Christianity is now in retreat, and "whatever post-Christian and anti-Christian thinkers may have thought they were doing, they were in fact contributing to a transformation within religion."

The structure of *Religion and Public Doctrine* is elegantly simple, for all the vastness of its exposition; the longueurs are surprisingly few, the narrative rarely flags, and the work as a whole succeeds at being exhaustive without being tedious (though, admittedly, opinions on this last point are likely to vary).

As I have noted, Volume I (Cambridge University Press, 1980) is in a sense autobiographical, though it records few details of Cowling's life. Rather, it situates his project within the field of intellectual forces that exerted an influence—for good or ill—over the evolution of his opinions. Hence it is governed by no chronology except that of Cowling's own formation: the first two major treatments in the volume are of Alfred North Whitehead and Arnold Toynbee, but the last drifts well back into the nineteenth century, to Lord Robert Cecil (Salisbury). And, by any standard other than the author's own peculiar intellectual history, the assortment of subjects is an eccentric one: in addition to the figures just named, it includes the "three Anglican reactionaries" Kenneth Pickthorn, Edward Welbourne, and Charles Smyth, as well as T. S. Eliot, David Knowles (whose works this book, one hopes, will revive), R. G. Collingwood, Herbert Butterfield, Michael Oakeshott, Winston Churchill, Elie Kedourie, and Evelyn Waugh; and, inter alia, Hugh Trevor-Roper, Christopher Hill, Lord Acton, Norman Sykes, Owen Chadwick, and Enoch Powell.

Though it introduces most of the themes that will recur throughout the trilogy, the chief pleasure this volume affords—being more diffusive than its successors—lies in the judgments it renders upon individual authors. Here, as elsewhere, Cowling's willful defiance of the dull, dry, judicious manner of the modern historian is absolute—as is, in consequence, his critical candor. It would be difficult to find a more pitiless dissection of Whitehead's "organism," or of the emptily idealistic optimism that allowed it to float with such beguiling buoyancy above the solid earth of human reality; and there is something at once discomfiting and exhilarating in Cowling's ruthless exposure of the banality, and of the immense intellectual amorphousness, of Toynbee's philosophy of history and "resentful, self-destructive, post-Christian liberalism." And Collingwood, for all his obvious brilliance, comes across as perhaps a mite demented, a sometimes unhealthily self-important scholar who "allowed philosophy and history a quasi-religious authority which no sensible man will allow, except inadvertently, to any academic subject."

Nor are Cowling's most penetrating criticisms aimed only *à la gauche*. It is clear, for instance, that he finds Oakeshott's thought finally somewhat fruitless. For all the insight it provides into the "practical" ubiquity of religion, and of the irreducible richness of moral intercourse in human society, it cannot provide the thing most needful, and seems fatally contaminated by a powerful current of "Nietzschean or Hobbesian amorality." And he is unsparingly honest about Churchill, who emerges as a redoubtable champion of civilization, without question, but also as a man whose mind was shaped by materialism, Darwinism, and a semi-pagan and even nihilistic pessimism, to whom "Christian reactions . . . should be . . . mixed." Eliot's observations on the decay of Christian culture in England are presented as very accomplished expressions of suspicion, dismay, melancholy, or foreboding, but mostly devoid of concrete content; and even of Eliot's poetry Cowling predicts that "very little of it will be durable once the generations that have learnt to follow it have passed away. Eliot will not speak directly to the future."

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With Volume II, subtitled *Assaults* (Cambridge Unversity Press, 1985), Cowling's project comes into focus, even as the number of subjects expands: Newman, Keble, Pusey, Gladstone, Manning, Ruskin, and Mill; George Eliot, Herbert Spencer, T. H. Huxley, and Leslie Stephen; Gilbert Murray, James Frazer, H. G. Wells, Belloc, Chesterton, and Shaw; W. H. Mallock, Winwood Read, Havelock Ellis, D. H. Lawrence, and Bertrand Russell. (I could go on.) It is in this volume that the case is most strikingly made that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' struggle between Christian and anti-Christian thinkers for the moral and social future of England was not—as might be supposed—a struggle between religious and post-religious thought, but a war of creeds. The story begins with the Christian attack—by high-church Tractarians and reflective Protestants—upon the post-Christian mythologies of the eighteenth century, and its occasionally confused attempt to turn back the tide of unbelief. But the plot becomes most engrossing where Cowling turns to the tradition he calls "ethical earnestness": that is, the "progressive" assault on Christianity from the time of Mill, Eliot, and Spencer to that of Russell and Lawrence. It is here that Cowling begins, in scrupulous detail, to identify the sources of the religious consciousness of post-Christian England. "Ethical earnestness," as he recounts its development, consisted in a profound, often inchoate, but semi-mystical devotion to social improvement and rational morality as alternatives to the superstition, obscurantism, and tyranny of the old faith.

It was not, however, in any meaningful sense "post-religious," as it demanded of its votaries absolute and fervent devotion to a principle—social cohesion, human development, "Life"—that was itself not susceptible of doubt. In a sense, it was a new cosmology allied to a new moral metaphysics, constantly in ferment, producing movements and sects and new beginnings, but never straying beyond the boundaries of the world in which it believed: a universe of Darwinian struggle that, precisely in its savage economy of "nature red in tooth and claw," demanded of conscience that it assist evolution in its ascent towards higher ethical realizations of the human essence. In Cowling's account, one comes to see not only the broad unity of the school of "ethical earnestness," but the final incoherence of its ethos: the closed order of nature is at once merciless chaos and the source of our ethics; morality is both obedience to nature and rebellion against nature's implacable decrees; progress demands at once universal brotherhood and (especially among socialists) a ruthless eugenic purification of the race. What unifies this farrago into something like a moral vision is its most obviously religious element: complete devotion to the future as an absolute imperative, requiring in consequence a renunciation of all faith in and charity towards the past—or, for that matter, the present.

This is both the most substantial and most diverting section of *Religion and Public Doctrine*, thronged as it is with sharply drawn portraits and bedizened with flashes of mordant wit. Cowling is extremely good at showing how, say, George Eliot's anti-Christian misunderstanding of Ruskin could so easily ally itself to her Feuerbachian ethical humanism, emanating its pale Dorotheas and paler creeds. But more enjoyable, and at the same time chilling, are the accounts of figures like Read (with his Malthusian, Darwinian, Comtean ideology and quaint utopianism of electricity, synthetic nutrition, and obedience to nature) or Ellis (with his worship of Art and Life, and his Nietzschean, Freudian, Frazerian dogmatism). Cowling's account of the turn of "ethical earnestness," in thinkers like Wells, Shaw, or Lawrence, towards a grimmer social and sexual vision—less hospitable to liberal optimism, more marked by the influences of Schopenhauer, Wagner, Nietzsche, Ibsen, and Freud—reminds one that a certain cold, pervasive fanaticism in this tradition might have carried "ethical earnestness" towards a politics considerably less fond and feckless than the wan, sincere, liberal secularism of post-Christian Britain. (Indeed, one finds oneself wondering whether the failure of English progressivism to produce some suitably demonic thinker who could have caused the tradition to precipitate into conscious nihilism can be attributed to anything other than the habitual British aversion to bombast and the cautionary example of Nazi Germany.)

In any event, Volume II concludes with an examination of those Christian apologists who applied themselves to the task of thwarting the march of secularization to ultimate victory: Mallock, Coventry Patmore, Chesterton, Belloc, Christopher Dawson, etc. Sadly, however, Cowling finds little here to encourage or detain him; however sympathetic he may be to one or all of these figures, none of them to his mind provides a very substantial riposte to the forces of modernity. Chesterton, for instance, quickly exhausts Cowling's patience with his jollity, paradox, and alternating appeals to common sense and to fairyland irrationality. Of the much-revered *The Everlasting Man*, Cowling concludes that its attempts at a philosophy failed through its author's incapacity, and that all its virtues taken together "did not stop the structure of the book cracking under the strain of its own weightlessness."

Thus, if Volume II chronicles the war waged for the future between Christian and post-Christian intellectuals, Volume III, subtitled *Accommodations*, is a somber survey of the aftermath, and tells of one side's

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resigned retreat from the field of battle and of the other's consequent relaxation from a posture of arrogant triumphalism to one of mere contemptuous complacency. It is an immense volume, which takes a huge variety of figures into its capacious embrace—Carlyle, Kingsley, Burke, Disraeli, Darwin, Matthew Arnold, Dickens, Tennyson, Browning, Pater, Wilde, Macaulay, Acton, Inge, Shaftesbury, Tawney, Gore, Figgis, C. S. Lewis, Alasdair MacIntyre, Aldous Huxley, Elgar, Parry, Keynes, Hayek, Eagleton, Koestler, and George Steiner (to name a few)—but its form is fairly elementary: it addresses, in order, the accommodationism of English Christian latitudinarians, attempting to adjust themselves to the supremacy of secularist public doctrine; the reaction of more traditional Christian thinkers against the innumerable little apostasies and capitulations latitudinarianism entails; and the final victory of the public orthodoxy that now nourishes the imperturbable sanctimony, hectoring moralism, tender authoritarianism, and infinite dreariness of post-Christian Britain.

Cowling's account of the internecine, twilit struggle between accommodationism and a more defiant Christian orthodoxy begins with a trenchant treatment of Carlyle, makes its way through mires and over ridges of "sweetness and light," liberal race theory, social theologies, and many other halfway houses between the cultures of faith and of disenchantment, sojourns for a time with the last generation of Christian apologists who had any cause to hope for a public hearing, and concludes with an interlaced treatment of Alasdair MacIntyre's retrieval of the rationality of "tradition" and the aforementioned Milbank's militant, quixotic campaign to drive back all of modernity into its lair (except, notes Cowling, for socialism, which "stands out like a sanctified sore thumb"). But the book draws to its conclusion with an account of the concrescence of England's new religious consensus into its present form: the arrival of Darwinian science, the rise of the "science" of psychology, the ascendancy in literature and the arts of post-Christian theories and practices, the development of macroeconomics, the evolution of British socialism and imbecile academic Marxism, the triumph of analytic philosophy, and many other of the broad currents that have subtly combined to replace faith in Christ with an (equally dogmatic) faith in sincerity, common sense, and social evolution.

It would be dishonest to deny that the great (and palpably wicked) pleasure that *Religion and Public Doctrine* affords its reader comes from the constantly flowing stream of caustic wit and surgically precise vituperation that runs through the entire work. The commentary rarely takes leave of any subject without leaving saber scars behind. This is, as I have said, part of Cowling's method; he sees the writing of history not as the impassive recording of neutral facts, but as an act of interpretation that speaks out of the preoccupations and experiences of the present by filtering the past through the prism of the historian's sensibility and reason. Still, principled method or not, it makes for very entertaining reading.

At times, the invective is bruisingly terse. Macaulay tended "to slobber over Bentham as a legal reformer"; "In his later years [Shaw] became a bore, windbag, and licensed clown"; "Orwell had a nasty mind and, probably, a nasty body"; "[Anthony] Kenny's philosophy is derivative, middle-rank, and wanting in the higher creative power"; and so on.

At its best, however, it is an invective of anfractuous fullness, which compresses large verdicts into small spaces. For example:

> [Raymond] Williams wrote at two levels—colloquially and self-confidently in confirming for audiences of his own persuasion the truths that they shared with him; opaquely and mistily in establishing the truth and coherence of those persuasions.

Or:

> As a religious thinker, [Matthew] Arnold had an attractive sadness and resignation towards inevitabilities. . . . But there was an unattractive aspect to this as well—a fatalism which made a strategy out of testing the wind and blowing with it, and a bland, accommodating, acquiescent Anglican grandeur which, while regretting the inevitability and lamenting the loss, was perfectly willing to accommodate away its own grandmother.

Or this uncomfortably accurate pastiche:

> [C. S.] Lewis bore the marks of Inkling-speak—the language of the pipe-smoking, beer-drinking "jolly middle earth" whose idea it was that Christ had avoided "idealistic gas," that mankind had got into a "terrible fix," and that it had to avoid "religious jaw" and "cut out" the "soft soap" which had been "talked about God for the last hundred years."

Or (one more example) this:

> The courtroom scenes [in Forster's *Passage to India*] were . . . quintessentially Hollywood. . . .

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> The Indian magistrate was a Hollywood hero, "Esmiss Esmoore's" memory a Hollywood effect, and Miss Quested's withdrawal of her allegations a vindication of Hollywood truth and right.

And then there is Cowling's trick of striking several targets at once. "[Ellis] was a bore, though less of a bore in socio-religious matters than Forster, say, or Auden"; "In reading Collingwood's later political ravings, one is reminded of Popper's *The Open Society* . . . which was written at the same time as *The New Leviathan*, and was subject to the same sort of hysteria"; and so forth. Allied to this, moreover, is a talent for ambiguous praise: "[Owen Chadwick's] strength, like that of his brother, Henry, is that combination of blandness, dignity, and learning which have been a special characteristic of the Anglican clergy."

The great strength of such writing is that it makes light reading out of 1,600 pages of close textual analyses. Its only weakness is that it can produce so dominant an impression in the reader's mind as to obscure the prudent care and moral seriousness of the argument being advanced. And it is an argument that demands a hearing. Nothing could be more important for an understanding of modernity (even if it is reached through a study only of the intelligentsia of England) than to recognize that we are not living in an age in which religious adherence has simply withered away before the parching wind of Enlightenment reason, but in one in which a new evangel has—over the course of a few centuries—displaced the old, and with it the cultural energy and rationale of Christian Europe: a new religion, whose most devout believers are as zealous, intolerant, and absolutist as any faith has ever produced, and whose vast silent constituency is as unreflective, passive, and pliant as any enfranchised clerisy could desire. It is good for Christians to grasp that, even in this hour, we struggle not simply with disillusion and demystification, but with strange gods.

However, Cowling's readers might protest, such knowledge is of little use if one does not—as Cowling refuses to do—lay out what the political and economic implications of Christian adherence should be. But, on this, Cowling is clear: he sees no legitimate liaison between Christian culture and a particular ideology. No less than the liberal religion that has captured the high ground of public doctrine, Christianity is a cultural and spiritual ecology, an impulse towards the ideal or ultimate that takes form in the bones and sinews (the cultural grammar) of a civilization, as well as a corporate and private habit of orientations, limits, practices, and possibilities—all of which allow for various social philosophies to arise and flourish, but which cannot be reduced to any of them. And this leads Cowling to make an assertion that, to idealistic Christians, might seem mildly perverse:

> A religion ought to be habitual and ought not to involve the self-consciousness inseparable from conversion. What Christianity requires is a second-generation sensibility in which . . . struggle has ceased to be of Christianity's essence. This is not a situation which can easily be achieved in the contemporary world; indeed, the religions which can most easily avoid self-consciousness in the contemporary world are the secular religions which are absorbed at the mother's knee or from the mother's television set.

In one sense, this might seem a counsel of hopelessness. Still, the burden of Cowling's argument is that, if indeed secularization is not what happens when religion withdraws, but is itself the positive artifact of an irrepressible religious agitation within human culture, then "it would be absurd to assume its permanence," because "the instinct for religion that lurks beneath the indifference of the public mind may yet surprise by its willingness to be led astray by Christianity."

Which leaves me, at least, with only one (unexpected) question: whether, despite Cowling's keen understanding of England's cultural quandary, his method of writing history has not led him towards something like faint and undue optimism. His only suggestion for how a second-generation Christian cultural sensibility might be recovered, apart from some cultural crisis that would spark a new generation of conversions, is "the slow influence which might be exerted by a Christian literature." At this point, though, I wonder whether Cowling's study might not profitably ballast itself with some element of material history. By all means, we should always be guilty of what Marx called ideology, and recognize that ideas shape culture at least as decisively as material conditions shape ideas, but one must ask whether, by confining his work to the rarefied atmosphere of intellectual discourse, Cowling does not allow himself to keep artificially alive debates that history has already decided.

At the level of general culture, England is post-Christian in ways that no one with a finite life should have the patience to enumerate—the deepening coarseness of popular culture, the spreading violence, Britain's pervasive malice towards its own cultural inheritance, demographic inanition, infantile politics, an almost total desiccation of a hunger for transcendence. While it is commendable that Cowling denies himself the glamor

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of the unheeded Cassandra, or of the dour encomiast possessed of desolate omniscience, one must observe that an ancient and syphilitic demimondaine is unlikely to revert to virgin purity again. There is a qualitative difference between the savage energy of the pagan heart and the paralytic morbidity of the post-Christian. Each comprises in itself a kind of nihilism, but the former is frequently unconscious of this, moved as it is by the vitality of natural appetites, dreads, and elations that can carry it from the world of the gods into the Kingdom of God; the latter is not only conscious of its nihilism, but proud of it, and easily converts private despair into general resignation, incuriosity, sterility—both animal and spiritual—and the pitiable charade of a kind of wry, disabused urbanity.

And yet, no doubt, Cowling is right. Can these bones live? It would be impious to say they cannot, and Christianity has perhaps triumphed over crueler gods than these. Cowling understands quite well the magnitude of what has been lost to secularization, and the grim prospects for any attempt to rebuild the edifice of Christian culture on English soil. Nonetheless, he also understands that at the heart of secularity are a thousand arbitrary and fanatical cultural decisions masquerading as realism, ethics, or progress; and, by relentlessly exposing their arbitrariness, his history makes conceivable the ultimate collapse of the religion they sustain. Which suggests that—as my divinity school friends of old would never have credited—Cowling's very aloofness from the political enthusiasms of the moment, and his severe and solvent habit of critical suspicion, allow him to see the cultural situation around him not so much as a wasteland as a, perhaps, fallow field, and so to regard the present and the future with neither pessimism nor optimism, but with something like a wisely diffident charity. FT

Summer's End

Yesterday
stealing from the sun
dandelions
lit the shaded path
briefly. Now they're gone.

Hurry through
faded meadows while
light still holds.
Days grow shorter; how
quickly evening comes.

Stirred to rise
by a falling foot,
feathered seeds
graceful on the breeze
drift towards the dawn.

David Anthony

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Books in Review

Seekers and Finders

The Life You Save May Be Your Own: An American Pilgrimage. By Paul Elie. *Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 555 pp. $27.*

Reviewed by Wilfred M. McClay

If the influence of religion has been largely elided or submerged in mainstream accounts of American intellectual history, then the role of Roman Catholicism in that history would have to be counted as doubly excluded. During the heyday of the American Studies movement in the years after World War II, when the larger meaning of "America" was (as it is becoming once again today) a vital and hotly debated topic, it was still possible for serious thinkers to regard the American nation as the lengthened shadow of certain Protestant and Enlightened ideas, often occurring in amalgamated form. Nineteenth-century American history was, in this view, a "progressive" story of a New Zion set down in the virgin wilderness, a fresh beginning for the human race that would follow its manifest destiny westward toward the earthly realization of God's kingdom.

As for the notion that Catholic ideas or thinkers might have contributed anything essential to the nation's meaning—well, that seemed too far-fetched even to require refutation. As the historian John Ibson wittily expressed it, students of American life saw little reason to "explore the possibility that for some nineteenth-century Americans the Virgin Mary was of more consequence than the Virgin Land." Even a brilliantly eccentric figure like Henry Adams, who seemed to defy that pattern, only confirmed it—for it was not the real Church in real time (or for that matter, the real Virgin) that he loved, but an idealized medieval Catholicism, chiefly designed to function as an opposite number to a modern world he had come to loathe and fear.

This state of affairs has begun to change, however, thanks to talented younger American historians such as James Terence Fisher, Patrick Allitt, and John McGreevy, whose works have filled in some of the blank spaces and made it much more difficult to ignore the vein of Catholic thought and expression running through American history. If it remains the case that this Catholic strain is best understood over the course of American history as a cultural foil, a counter to mainstream ideals of individualism and autonomy, then it has at least been a remarkably productive foil, one whose enriching acts deserve much more attention than the record has thus far accorded it.

Paul Elie's sprawling, spirited, and immensely appealing book, *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*, is a significant contribution to that record, though perhaps all the more effective for not being self-consciously intended as one. Elie has not set out to rewrite American history. He has instead merely taken as his subject the lives and works of four twentieth-century American Catholic writers: the activist Dorothy Day, the monk Thomas Merton, and the Southern writers Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy. His book seeks to draw them together into a movement of sorts, a band of pilgrims, a loose coalition of inveterate seekers whose unflagging search for ultimate meaning is an example worthy of our study and our imitation.

Why these four? Although they did not quite form a proper intellectual circle in their actual lives, the similarities between them are complex but genuine. Obviously, for one thing, there were the shared profound religious concerns which informed their lives' work and caused them to be labeled "the School of the Holy Ghost." But the similarity goes further. All four were, in some sense, deeply marginal figures, being either adult converts to the Roman Catholic faith at a time when such conversion was costly, or, in the case of O'Connor, being constrained to live out her Catholic life surrounded by a sea of Southern Protestants. All four were deeply critical of the arrogant spirit of modernity and sought in Catholicism an escape from a "progressive" world which left no place of grace intact. And—a matter very important to Elie—all four placed an extraordinarily high valuation upon the written and printed word as an avenue of spiritual inquiry. They were people who lived in and through books, in a way that is increasingly rare today. Perhaps it is no coincidence that they also had in common the ability to produce works of extraordinarily high quality, whose influences echo down to the present day.

What is most attractive about Elie's book is its earnest and unfeigned passion for such a wor-

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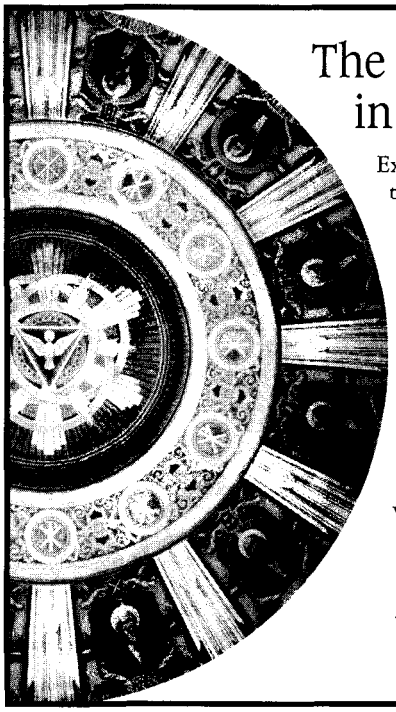
thy but unfashionable subject. Underneath it all, one senses, is his own passion for books. An editor by trade, Elie is clearly a man devoted to the possibilities of the written word, both his own and that of his subjects. Books, he almost seems to say, can save us. One may actually come to know the truth through them, in the thought-haven of their world apart, and indeed one can hardly do so without them. Although no one would mistake *The Life You Save* for a work of Catholic apologetics, it is an unusually affirmative work, a splendid counter to the cynicism and obscurantism that have brought literary scholarship in present-day America to the point of ruin. It is affirmative of its subjects, affirmative of their bookishness, affirmative of the possibilities of the written word, and affirmative of its subjects' shared pilgrimage—the endless high-minded seeking that consumed their lives. Its prose is pleasingly lean and astonishingly jargon-free, and its analysis of texts is nearly always fresh and engaging. The author's enthusiasm is infectious.

BUT THIS FINE WORK also has some considerable faults, and given its many commendable points, one comments upon those faults only with the greatest reluctance. But comment one must, and to begin with, one must remark upon the book's perplexing and confusing structure. Elie has chosen to tell all four of his subjects' separate stories at once, rendering their lives in alternating bits and pieces, shifting from person to person, jumping from time period to time period, in a way that is difficult for even knowledgeable readers to follow. Elie's lucid style somehow manages to carry the day, making the book eminently readable even in spite of this expository chaos. But the constant resort to a "meanwhile, back at the ranch" style of exposition can be distracting to the point of exasperation, and most emphatically does not add to the book's appeal.

Such a stylistic choice, moreover, reflects a substantive problem, as stylistic choices so often do. Elie doesn't ever really make a detailed argument for the linkage of Day, Merton, O'Connor, and Percy. Indeed, the book does not really offer an argument at all. Instead, it merely proposes to gather together these four figures, linked by the common theme of pilgrimage, and relying on the charm of an engaging narrative style to carry the intellectual burden of cohesiveness. But even the most winsome individual stories do



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not automatically weave themselves together into a larger whole; they require the loom of an argument to bring them into a more meaningful unity. Perhaps Elie avoided this approach in order to give priority to his subjects' biographies and avoid any taint of academicism, both of which are commendable aims.

But the choice may have inadvertently had the opposite effect, blurring the subjects together, and sacrificing a searching examination of their psychological peculiarities by blending it all into a larger (if itself ill-defined) story of pilgrimage. I did not, for example, find in Elie's book any account of the early influences that helped make Dorothy Day and Flannery O'Connor into such strange and formidable personalities; it all seems to emerge from nowhere, forming the "set" with which they make sense of subsequent experience. Ultimately, it is a book about pilgrimage, and as the subtitle suggests, the pilgrimage is somehow the same for all of them.

That brings me to a final concern, well expressed by one of the book's blurbs, from the literary scholar Harold Bloom: "As a work of the spirit, [*The Life You Save*] is universal and in no way sectarian." Bloom of course meant this as praise, but I am not so sure that it should be taken thus. It is entirely misleading to think of these four Catholics, all of them Catholic by fierce or passionate choice, as nonsectarian pilgrims. It presumes something that one has no right to presume, but that right-thinking and "spiritual" people in the Western world now presume every day: that ultimate truth is relative or pluriform, and the "journey" of pilgrimage is more important than the convictions of the pilgrims, or the destination toward which they journey. For all of Elie's immense sympathetic regard for his subjects, he gently betrays them at the end of his book, with a conclusion that would, I feel sure, have earned him a rap on the knuckles from the blunt and unflappable Flannery O'Connor. "We are all skeptics now," he writes, "believer and unbeliever alike. There is no one true faith, evident at all times and places. Every religion is one among many. The clear lines of any orthodoxy are made crooked by our experience, and complicated by our lives." It is as if one suddenly awakened from a noble dream to find oneself in a lecture hall at the Harvard Divinity School.

FORTUNATELY, this tired and conventional conclusion is undermined by the underlying strengths of Elie's own account. For these four pilgrims, the Catholic faith was not just a plausible way station, an intellectual and moral tradition that floated their boats. And Elie knows it. Just two paragraphs before the above passage, Elie quotes from a letter O'Connor wrote to an apostate friend. "[My essay] is about the things that hold us fast in Christ when Christ is taken to be divine," she wrote. "It is worthless if it is not true." A pilgrimage is similarly worthless if it is not going to the right place.

One of the settled but largely unspoken pieties of our time is the notion that "seekers" have greater moral authority than "finders." It is a silly piety when stated clearly. But whenever it is openly challenged, one sees how entrenched it is. I remember hearing a luminous convocation address at a small Catholic college, in which the speaker declared, roughly, the following: "The American academy esteems the search for truth, and we wholly concur in that at St. X's. What is different about our college, though, is that we are willing to entertain the possibility that the truth has, in some instances, been found." Judging from the horrified reaction from the faculty, one would have thought the speaker

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had just declared himself the emperor of a totalitarian theocracy. And much of their criticism boiled down to the notion that it is more blessed to seek than to find, to criticize than to affirm, a notion that any genuine pilgrim would find utterly unintelligible.

Still, there is so much to admire and cherish in Elie's book that one is inclined to forgive him even this fault, and ignore his attempt to wrap up a story that is unwrappable. D. H. Lawrence was on to something when he urged us in reading literature to trust the tale and not the teller. In this case, the tale turns out to be much larger than the framework within which the author attempts to confine it. But Lawrence's distinction breaks down in the end, for the telling of tales is also a way that the teller advances his own knowledge of the world. What makes Elie's book so finally winning and valuable is his own search, the meaning that one senses moving behind and beyond his pages. He's written an extraordinary book, and I hope he won't stop here. And I mean that in more ways than one.

The Reality of the Beautiful

SPEAKING OF BEAUTY. By DENIS DONOGHUE. *Yale University Press. 209 pp. $24.95.*

Reviewed by Edward T. Oakes

SEVERAL DAYS after the massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, the *New York Times* commissioned an essay for its op-ed page from a native of Littleton. He described how his hometown had changed from a quiet village located well outside the urban environs of Denver into part of the suburban sprawl that now characterizes the entire national landscape, transforming his placid town into a seedbed for despair:

> I grew up in a town endowed, however humbly, with a character and a sense of place, and I had those things, too. What sense of place can there be in the Littletons of America now, in these mall-lands where each Gap and McDonald's is like the next, where the differences between things are neither prized nor scorned but are simply wiped from existence? Growing up in an anonymous landscape, how can anyone escape his own encroaching sense of anonymity? In this world, meaning evaporates. In a world of monotonous getting and spending, the need to shake things up, to make a mark—any mark—may overpower everything else, including sense. . . . The Trench Goat Mafia's particular brand of evil may have stemmed from a terrible absence—a loss of perspective that might be one of the unforeseen consequences of a loss of place.

The forces that have transformed the American landscape in the past thirty years or so to make it so dreary and monotonous are not the focus of Denis Donoghue's pleas-

EDWARD T. OAKES, S.J., *is the author of* Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar *(Continuum).*

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antly written *Speaking of Beauty*. But like the native of Littleton quoted above, Donoghue certainly recognizes that beauty is, so to speak, a "trace mineral" for the human soul: just as a body robbed of zinc or salt for an extended length of time will undermine its own health, so too the soul can get by without a regular diet of beauty only so long before its own psychic metabolism gets thrown out of whack.

Unfortunately, as William Butler Yeats wrote in his poem "Adam's Curse," "we must labor to be beautiful." It takes commitment, hard work, not just to build the Sydney Opera House but even to insist that there be one, and that it be done well. But a society lazy about beauty will become, in Donoghue's words, "indifferent to smog, litter, what Henry James called 'trash triumphant,' lurid communications, wretched TV, billboards, strip malls, blatancies of noise and confusion—or it considers these things the price you have to pay to make more money." Donoghue, a literary critic from Ireland now a professor at New York University, offers no plan, no list of suggestions, no blue-panel program, for ameliorating our contemporary moonscape. How could he? For such a utilitarian approach would undermine the point of the book, which examines why beauty remains so elusive a concept and such an abiding reproach to mere utility. As he says on the opening page, beauty "thrives on keeping quiet and never explains itself."

As befits such an opening, Donoghue has no thesis or nugget-statement to flog, no particular sound-bite that the reader might take away from a pleasant evening spent reading this charming essay. The speaking that Donoghue does in *Speaking of Beauty* is conversational, anecdotal, allusive, and circular, although deeply learned for all that, and teeming with insights. Among the latter, perhaps the most important is a line taken from Immanuel Kant's famous treatise on aesthetics, the *Critique of Judgment*: a tulip, Kant says, "is regarded as beautiful because in perceiving it we find a certain purposiveness which, in our judgment, refers to no purpose at all." This perhaps enigmatic statement points both to the fact that, in art anyway, beauty of form indicates design (hence purposiveness), but, like all forms of play (and all art is a form of play), it is done for no other purpose than

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itself (hence beauty's neuralgic relation to utility). But since recognition of beauty in art is rooted in a prior experience of beauty in nature, both reveal something about reality as such. As Donoghue notes in glossing this passage from Kant, and relying here on Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, "When we find a scene in nature beautiful—the scene itself having no significance of content—we feel that nature has produced this beauty in our favor. Nature has given us a sign that we are the ultimate goal of creation."

OVER AGAINST this marvelous insight stands the position adopted by various Marxist critics of the Frankfurt School, such as Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and George Lukacs. Toward these critics Donoghue is properly cautious, accepting their insights within due limits but warning as well that "good causes are regularly damaged by exorbitant claims for them, and by excesses in their practice." This certainly applies to Adorno's criticism of Kant: "The disinterested pleasure that according to Kant is aroused by works of art can only be understood by virtue of historical antitheses still at work in each aesthetic object. The thing now being disinterestedly contemplated pleases only because it once claimed the utmost interest and thus precluded contemplation."

At face value, this claim seems to ban disinterested (meaning, non-utilitarian) contemplation as a bourgeois illusion: only engagement counts. Or as Donoghue wittily paraphrases the position: "By being disinterested, I clear a space for certain perceptions that would not survive in the marketplace. I cultivate a semblance of desire rather than yield to desire. But it is possible to interpret disinterestedness in several ways. You could take it as an attribute of the wealthy class, which can afford to treat life as a spectacle and to look at beautiful objects without committing the vulgarity of desiring them. As for desire, they could leave that to their servants."

Such an outlook is not outright wrong, in the sense of asserting that two plus two equals five, but it certainly can be taken too far; and the incantatory, declamatory style affected by Marxist critics should alert us to their—to borrow one of their own favorite terms—"totalizing," "hegemonic" intent.

Take, for example, the line of another Marxist critic, Frederic Jameson, now plying his trade at Duke University, who asserts that "the visible is *essentially* pornographic, which is to say that it has its end in rapt, mindless fascination." Now it is true that pornography is the premier sign of the decadence of late capitalism, and the fact that liberalism can offer no moral or legal objections to it is a sure indication that liberalism is far more complicit in capitalism's dynamic than are non-libertarian schools of political conservatism, paleo-, neo-, or whatever. But only a Marxist utterly hung up and scandalized by disinterested contemplation could equate all gazing with consumption of pornography. Far better to escape the oxygen-deprived air found in the higher altitudes of the *Frankfurter Schule* and Duke University for the insights of novelists such as Tim O'Brien, who gets at the nugget of Jameson's legitimate insight buried underneath its absurd formulation. In his novel *The Things They Carried*, he has one of his characters say:

> The truths are contradictory. It can be argued, for instance,

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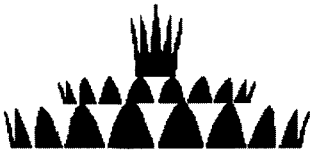
> that war is grotesque. But in truth war is also beauty. For all its horror, you can't help but gape at the awful majesty of combat. You stare out at tracer rounds unwinding through the dark like brilliant red ribbons. You crouch in ambush as a cool, impassive moon rises over the nighttime paddies. You admire the fluid symmetries of troops on the move, the harmonies of sounds and shape and proportion, the great sheets of metal-fire streaming down from a gun-ship, . . . the rocket's red glare. It's not pretty, exactly. It's astonishing. It fills the eye. It commands you. You hate it, yes, but your eyes do not.

HERE WE COME close to a Christian aesthetics, paradoxical as that might sound. In his recent book on the Church Fathers, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God*, Robert Louis Wilken speaks of the patristic axiom, "We are changed into the one we see." In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint), early Christians read that the Israelites "saw the voice of the Lord" (Exodus 20:18 in the Septuagint numbering). For a thinker like Origen this meant that the voice of the Lord is "seen" only by those to whom it is given to see. Luke calls the disciples "eyewitnesses of the Word," which again means that they saw more than just Jesus in his bodily form (Judas and Pilate saw that much) but recognized him in his true identity as the Word of God.

Only a Christian aesthetics can resolve the Marxist dilemma outlined above: the tension between disinterested gaze and rapt attention can be resolved only when what we see coheres with its true beauty in God's intentions. Donoghue quotes the great pioneer of a Christian theological aesthetics, Hans Urs von Balthasar, throughout his book, especially at the outset, and to great effect (one more sign, if any be needed, that orthodox theologians like Augustine, Pascal, and Balthasar speak much more directly to secular culture than do accommodationists like Tillich and Rahner). Of course, as Donoghue well realizes when he brings Balthasar into the argument, "if we took him as seriously as he deserves, we would have to change our lives." But then, not to do so leaves us mired between bourgeois disinterestedness and empty Marxist engagement (itself a kind of professorial disinterestedness, as we have seen), not to mention trapping us inside a world of pornography and strip malls. So Donoghue leaves us in no doubt that Balthasar's vision would liberate us. No wonder he feels drawn to this magnificent passage in the first volume of Balthasar's *The Glory of the Lord*:

> Before the beautiful—no, not really *before* but *within* the beautiful—the whole person quivers. He not only "finds" the beautiful moving; rather, he experiences himself as being moved and possessed by it. The more complete this experience is, the less does a person seek and enjoy only the delight that comes through the senses or even through any act of his own; the less also does he reflect on his own acts and states. Such a person has been taken up wholesale into the reality of the beautiful and is now fully subordinate to it, determined by it, animated by it.



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Gerard Manley Hopkins, had already anticipated the Marxist critics when he asked in one of his poems, "To what serves mortal beauty?" and answered with the next line, "Dangerous. Does set dancing blood." But he had the advantage of faith, of his own personal, even idiosyncratic way of "seeing the voice" of the Lord. For that reason he could say in "Pied Beauty,"

All things counter, original,
spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled
(who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet,
sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose
beauty is past change:
Praise him.

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The Limits of Theory

PRAISE AND BLAME: MORAL REALISM AND ITS APPLICATIONS. By DANIEL N. ROBINSON. *Princeton University Press. 225 pp. $29.95.*

Reviewed by R. R. Reno

PRAISE AND BLAME are cultural practices that shape our desires, intentions, and actions. Praise a child for something, and you will likely get more of the same. Blame a child and the pressure is reversed. An awards ceremony bestows the former; the detention hall signifies the latter. The hard-bitten cynic and skeptic smiles with inward pride when his friends chuckle over his well-wrought and ironic disdain for conventional pieties. A reader of the *Nation* cringes with regret when caught affirming a bourgeois value.

Praise and blame function even where they would seem to lack a foundation. Among postmodernists, a word such as "onto-theological," however conceptually obscure, serves as a synonym for "bad." Those who criticize morality traffic in exhortation (long live difference!) and denunciation (away with the metaphysics of presence!). The greatest anti-moralist of all, Friedrich Nietzsche, saw this clearly. As he announced in his *Genealogy of Morals*, the most pressing question about morality is moral: What is the value of values? Should I praise my son when he blames his sister for hitting him? Should I encourage my students to think about literature, society, and each other with a moral vocabulary? Is it a good or bad thing to think of the ideas, actions, and characters of people as "good" or "bad"?

R. R. RENO *teaches theology at Creighton University and is the author of* In the Ruins of the Church: Sustaining Faith in an Age of Diminished Christianity *(Brazos, 2002).*

Daniel N. Robinson, a long-time critic of the therapeutic psychology of modernity, knows very well that our intellectual culture has been overrun by this oddly moralistic ambivalence about praise and blame. He is concerned to counter the philosophical assumptions that might lead sixth-grade teachers to speak of student misbehavior as "unhelpful," "unhealthy," or "inappropriate." The soft relativism of our culture balks at the sharp hardness of "bad" and "wrong." Murder, for example, is "anti-social behavior." Theft "undermines social cooperation." People with vicious characters are "poorly socialized." It is not so much that we are morally vacant as that we are morally diffident. We lack the conviction that the old-fashioned words are appropriate.

AGAINST OUR TENDENCY to question the value of values, the basic, implicit argument of Robinson's *Praise and Blame: Moral Realism and Its Applications* is that the most fundamental importance of values is their truthfulness. We should call murder "wrong" rather than "anti-social" because the former is more accurate than the latter. I should encourage my students to use moral terms to assess aspects of what they study because to be so trained is necessary for them to adequately grasp and explain the way things are.

The question of whether or not our praise and blame reflects something real admits of no definitive answer, and Robinson's argumentative strategy is defensive rather than probative. He argues that moral realism should be our default position. Ordinary language and practice functions as if moral qualities are real, and absent compelling reason to think otherwise, we should assume our moral language and practice functions rightly. In other words, one need not prove that moral qualities exist. The burden of

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proof falls on those who would think words such as "right" and "wrong" refer to something other than rightness and wrongness in the world itself.

There are at least three interlocking reasons why many moral philosophers think moral qualities are nonexistent, and Robinson addresses each of them in a tour through leading preoccupations of modern moral philosophy. First, the diversity of moral judgments across different cultures and historical moments has encouraged modern thinkers to conceive of moral values as socially constructed. Second, the authoritative intellectual project of our culture—the natural sciences—seems to exclude moral reality from the world. Third, as J. L. Mackie famously observed, were moral qualities to exist, they would be extremely odd—indeed utterly different from any other entities in the scientifically observable universe.

Robinson's response to these objections to moral realism is complex, but the general outline is straightforward. The basic premise is that reality is plural in form. It thus cannot be subsumed into a single ontology, whether that of modern science or Aristotelian metaphysics. For Robinson, the fact that moral properties seem so unlike physical properties should not surprise us. If reality is plural in form, then we should expect that the techniques of scientific investigation might not be appropriate for moral analysis. Perceiving moral properties demands the development of different and perhaps more fallible epistemic resources. If moral properties are indeed different from physical properties (after all, ordinary language does use different words), then it makes sense to suppose that our investigations of these properties would use normative rather than explanatory methods and produce moral competence rather than scientific knowledge as a result.

YET DEFENDING praise and blame is not simply a matter of moral ontology and epistemology. Moral terms refer to the intentions, actions, and characters of persons. The body of the book and its strongest and most helpful analysis thus probes the worry that our identities as persons, the consequences of our actions, and our mental states seem so deeply embedded in the world that we are tempted to think that we are effects rather than causes, deter-

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announces the appointment of

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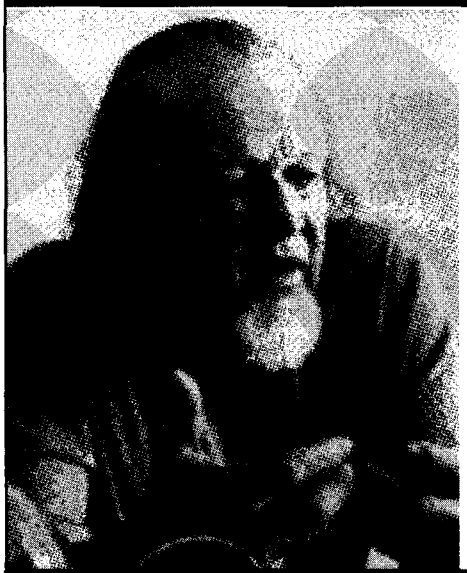

Nancy Pearcey, one of America's best known evangelical apologists, has been appointed the Francis A. Schaeffer Scholar of the World Journalism Institute. She will be responsible for Christian worldview instruction at WJI, the nation's largest independent school of journalism for aspiring Christian journalists. Mrs. Pearcey is the author of the book *Set the Gospel Free* (Crossway Books) and the co-author of *How Now Shall We Live?* with Charles Colson and *The Soul of Science* with Charles Thaxton.

Mrs. Pearcey studied under Francis Schaeffer at L'Abri Fellowship in Switzerland and at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. She has a master's degree from Covenant Theological Seminary. Mrs. Pearcey is a senior fellow of the Discovery Institute and a former policy director and senior fellow of the Wilberforce Forum and has served as the managing editor of the journal *Origins & Design.* Her articles have appeared in *The Washington Times, Human Events, First Things, Books & Culture, WORLD, The Human Life Review, Christianity Today,* and the *Regent University Law Review.*

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mined rather than free. Here the challenge to moral realism is more refined, claiming, in effect, that although goodness might exist, it cannot be ascribed to my behavior, because so little of my behavior is genuinely mine.

To meet this objection, Robinson undertakes a detailed series of reflections upon determinism, voluntarism, and moral luck, ignorance, deception, and weakness of will, freedom and causality, motivation and the unconscious. The discussions are extraordinarily wide-ranging. Across the twists and turns of argument, Robinson offers a compelling account of the limited moral consequences of many contemporary doubts about moral agency.

AT THE END of the day, however, the debate between moral realists and antirealists is intractable and less significant than Robinson imagines. Our cultural tendency to second-guess traditional moral judgments is based upon changes in the surrounding culture—changes that are largely a cause rather than an effect of developments in moral philosophy. We think differently about moral theory today because we moralize differently.

Robinson is not insensitive to the close relationship between moral practice and moral theory. The last chapter of the book explores practices of punishment and forgiveness. The results are illuminating and provide a clearer rationale for preserving traditional notions of retribution and desert than do Robinson's attempts to defend moral realism as a philosophical doctrine.

Like realism generally, moral realism is a disciplining conviction. Scientists recognize that they must train their minds and guard against deception in order to better understand the natural world. The same holds for moral realists. We must train ourselves in order to become, as Robinson puts it, "morally competent beings." What Robinson does not discuss is the fact that the Aristotelian tradition of moral training for excellence cuts against the grain of our democratic and egalitarian sensibilities. If our moral judgments must be trained in order to perceive moral reality more accurately, then one person's moral judgment is not necessarily as good as another's. Insofar as we treat democracy as a high moral vision rather than a device for securing political legitimacy and restraining the power of elites, we will shirk from such a conclusion.

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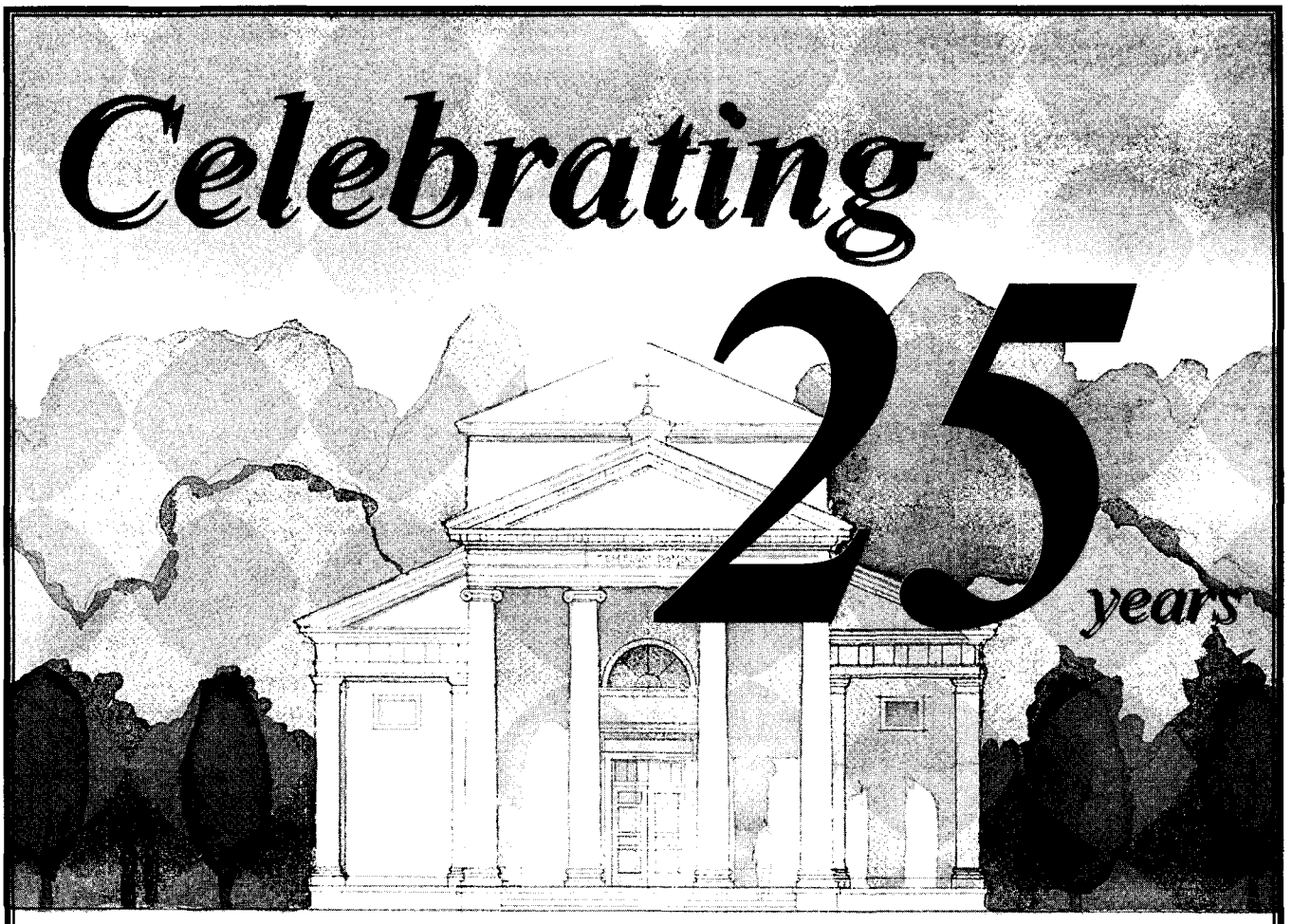

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Here, a moral qualm undermines morality.

Even more challenging to the present age, moral realism implies moral striving. It is telling that a moral realist such as St. Thomas Aquinas should formulate the most fundamental principle of the natural law as a comprehensive life-project: seek good and avoid evil. To see the good as good, and evil as evil, and not as expressions of sentiment or social constructions, creates an urgency of purpose not reassuring to our somnolent souls. Moral heroes and saints, Robinson observes, "instruct us in just how high the bar really is." If real, the good is, as Iris Murdoch recognized, sovereign. Praise and blame are its knights-errant, championing us in our loyalty to its reign and harrying us in our rebellions.

The vision is very noble, but as a matter of cultural fact, our commitments to personal freedom and self-expression—themselves taken as moral properties—lead us to unseat all such knights and restrain their scope for action. We are more likely to praise tolerance than virtue, diversity than excellence. Such priorities do not entail a loss of moral language, nor do they necessarily indicate a turn away from moral realism. Our relativism is "soft" precisely because it is not relativism in any theoretically precise and defensible sense. Perhaps the sharpest division in American society today is between those who condemn abortion and those who condemn those who condemn abortion. Virtually no one swears off condemnation altogether.

In the end, our dominant uses of praise and blame—for instance, not praising chastity or not blaming greed—reflect the ways in which our culture trains our moral vision. With Robinson, I regret this training and think it dulls rather than sharpens our perception of moral reality. Unlike Robinson, however, I think theories of moral reality do little moral work. Clear thinking can do away with misconceptions that might lead us astray. Yet the positive task of recovering a more humane moral competence will require good moralists, not good moral theorists. For a moralist teaches us the anatomy of virtue and vice, helping us to see and understand what is at stake in particular judgments and practices. This Robinson begins to do for us in his final chapter, with its discussion of punishment and forgiveness. May his work continue in this direction.

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THE BOOK AGAINST GOD. By JAMES WOOD. *Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 257 pp. $24.*

Reviewed By Dermot Quinn

JAMES WOOD is a formidable writer with a growing reputation. Solidly the product of the English middle classes—a classical education, a childhood of music lessons and cathedral evensong, a degree from Cambridge—he was chief literary critic of the *Guardian* newspaper in London before becoming a senior editor of the *New Republic* in 1995. Add to this a well-received volume of essays in 1999—*The Broken Estate*—and a pen by turns elegant, witty, indignant, and fiercely uncompromising, and the result is a name likely to become greater as years go by. Wood is also, unabashedly, an atheist: no hindrance in the world he has chosen to inhabit.

The Broken Estate, subtitled "Essays on Literature and Belief," records Wood's loss of faith, his embrace of literature, the latter becoming a new faith, a more humanly persuasive account of love and loss than the too-confident theodicy of his churchly upbringing. Wood's childhood was spent "in the command economy of evangelical Christianity," an Anglican past he has abandoned with relief but with perhaps some small nostalgic regret for its vanished balm, its liturgical and musical beauty, its theological certainty in the face of a suffering world. Now he has written a novel, *The Book Against God*, and—critic turned practitioner—he awaits the judgment of his peers and public. The first may be kinder than the second. His prose has the painterly quality that appeals to the trade ("in summer, [the trees] exuberate into green, each leaf a delegate sent out by life . . . their broad stems pedestals to the caught heaviness above them"), but what the *Times Literary Supplement* calls his "obsessive intellectual wrestling" turns out to be surprisingly pedestrian: more of a pillow fight in the Lower Sixth dorm than a serious engagement with the truth.

THUS DESCRIBED, James Wood sounds very much like a character in a novel by, well, James Wood. Indeed, *The Book Against God*, set in the overlapping worlds of academia, music, journalism, and the Church, is narrated by Thomas Bunting, an undeniably clever unbeliever, impatient with the easy comforts of religion, psychologically sharp, bookishly dedicated to the life of the mind: the very model of a modern metropolitan. Like his creator, he graduated with top honors; like him, he writes with panache and superb fluency; like him, he despises the frail logic of belief. There the resemblance ends. Bunting is a liar on an antiheroic scale. Hostile to the falsehoods of religion and the social conventions with which it protects itself, he has his own serial problems with the truth. Everyone is lied to: wife, parents, colleagues, friends. The world thinks he is writing a Ph.D. dissertation—almost finished, he says, so that a proper lectureship will be his, a job enabling him to stand on his own feet and be no longer dependent on his implausibly patient wife.

Not so. The thesis is a sham, long ignored as another volume takes shape. This is the "Book Against God"—part diary, part confessional, part collection of profundity-seeking aphorisms—wherein he rails against every defense and defender

DERMOT QUINN *is Associate Professor of History at Seton Hall University and serves on the Board of Advisors of the G. K. Chesterton Institute for Faith and Culture.*

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UNIVERSITY FACULTY FOR LIFE
FOURTEENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE
JUNE 4-6, 2004
ST. THOMAS UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW
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University Faculty for Life is a non-denominational, multi-disciplinary organization which welcomes the membership and participation of all pro-life faculty in institutions of higher education. In 2004 its annual conference will be held at the St. Thomas University School of Law in early June. Attendance is open to members or former members of college, university, or seminary faculty and their spouses, or to others by individual request.

Proposals for presentations are invited. There will be two types of sessions at the conference. One, of a more informal character, features papers which are presented and discussed by the audience, but are not subject to prepared commentary. Other sessions will have commentators who will present prepared responses to the papers. The deadline for paper proposals, including title and a one page outline, is April 5. The proposal should indicate the type of session preferred; the final decision as to the type of session will be made by the Program Committee. Where a prepared commentary is called for, papers must be available a month before the conference.

All papers can be submitted for possible publication in *Life and Learning*, an annual peer-reviewed selection of conference papers.

The conference will begin early on the afternoon of Friday, June 4. Registration for the conference, including a wine and cheese reception, refreshments between sessions and the concluding banquet, is $60.00. Accommodation is available at several nearby hotels.

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or email: kingt@georgetown.edu

To propose a paper, contact:

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Department of History
University of Guelph
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Canada
or email: kcassidy@uoguelph.ca

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of divinity. Gradually, as his marriage collapses and his never very promising career goes down the drain, the book becomes a kind of mania. It is his only friend, the one companion to take him seriously as others abandon him to fecklessness. After a row with his father or a trip to the pub, a visit to the dole or a morning spent in bed, the book will be opened and added to, a secret pleasure threatening to take over his life.

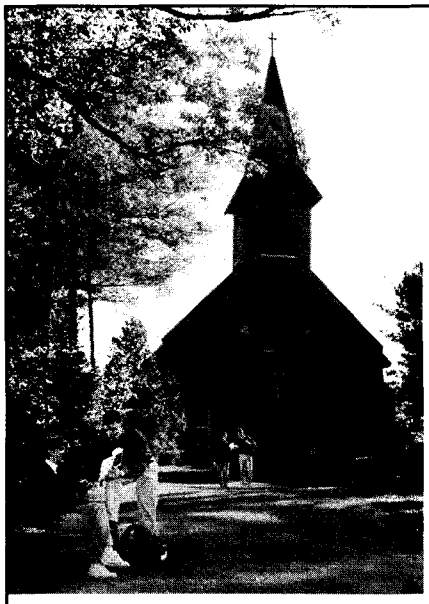
Here, as only slowly he comes to realize, is the solipsist's madness powerfully symbolized: he is man alone in the cell of his own mind, arguing with a shadow, an absence, an empty space. Even as a metaphysical category, a mere philosophical problem to be solved, God cannot leave him alone. He chases Bunting down the labyrinthine ways, down the nights and down the days, haunting his waking hours and his dreaming. They have become old enemies to each other, God and Bunting, their hostility strangely comforting, familiar and fixed in a world of disintegration. The midnight scribbler wants God gone but lacks the courage to banish Him forever. Addicted to phantom conversation, to debate with a Holy Ghost, he resembles a famous madman of literature, expounder of the modernist dilemma in four simple lines:

> *As I was going up the stair*
> *I met a man who wasn't there*
> *He wasn't there again today*
> *I wish, I wish he'd stay away*

God—most annoyingly—refuses to stay away. For his part, Bunting has neither heart nor head to close the door for good.

BUNTING IS NOT WOOD, but surface resemblances suggest a teasing autobiographical turn. To read *The Broken Estate* is to see anticipated some of the ideas of *The Book Against God*: the inadequacy of theism in the face of higher criticism or propositional logic, the "evasions and weak-mindedness" of much that passed for theology in the nineteenth century, the empty conceit of established religion, the paltry certitudes of the man in the pew. Wood's atheism began as adolescent revolt and, conceptually, has not gone much beyond it.

> At the age of fifteen or so, I sat down with a notebook and tore myself away from belief in God. . . . You are so quickly, so easily free. . . . Before one has read any atheist or skeptical philosophy one has apparent-



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> ly invented the old, old objections to God—the problem of evil and suffering in the world, the senseless difficulty of faith, the cruelty of heaven and hell, the paganism of Jesus' 'sacrifice,' one's own lack of religious experience. . . . These objections are so obvious and so old that atheism, as a philosophical tradition, is generally underpowered.

The result is that literary atheism tends to be little more than "gauntlet-throwing naughtiness," mere debating society stuff. He wants stronger material. Yet Wood cannot resist naughtiness himself, craving the old teenage pleasures—God as Nonsense, as Bully, as Cosmic Thug—while demanding an atheism at once more confident of its philosophical implications and less ignorant of "the negative revolution" it has begun. Bunting as thinker is little more than a vehicle for the arguments that Wood claims to be shopworn and too easy. Recognizing their over-familiarity, Wood still wants to give them another outing, a last loving look. This is tiresome. He hopes to have it both ways, throwing every argument against God, even the hoariest ones, but inoculating himself against criticism by mounting the "I-am-not-the-narrator" defense.

As for the deeper implications he claims to find in a more mature atheism, these turn out to be variations on a nihilist theme. As Wood writes in *The Broken Estate*, "Life-under-God seems a pointlessness posing as a purpose (the purpose, presumably, being to love God and to be loved in return); life-without-God seems to me also a pointlessness posing as a purpose (jobs, family, sex and so on—all the usual distractions). The advantage, if it can be described as one, of living in the latter state, without God, is that the false purpose has at least been invented by man, and one can strip it away to reveal the actual pointlessness." So *this* is the Big Idea? Poor Mr. Wood. Chased by the Hound of Heaven, it turns out that all the while he was running away from a chihuahua.

THE TRUTH is that *The Book Against God* is not the "elegant novel of ideas" one critic claims it to be. There is elegance, to be sure, both of description and psychological insight. Wood's writing is full of fine surface effects and painfully

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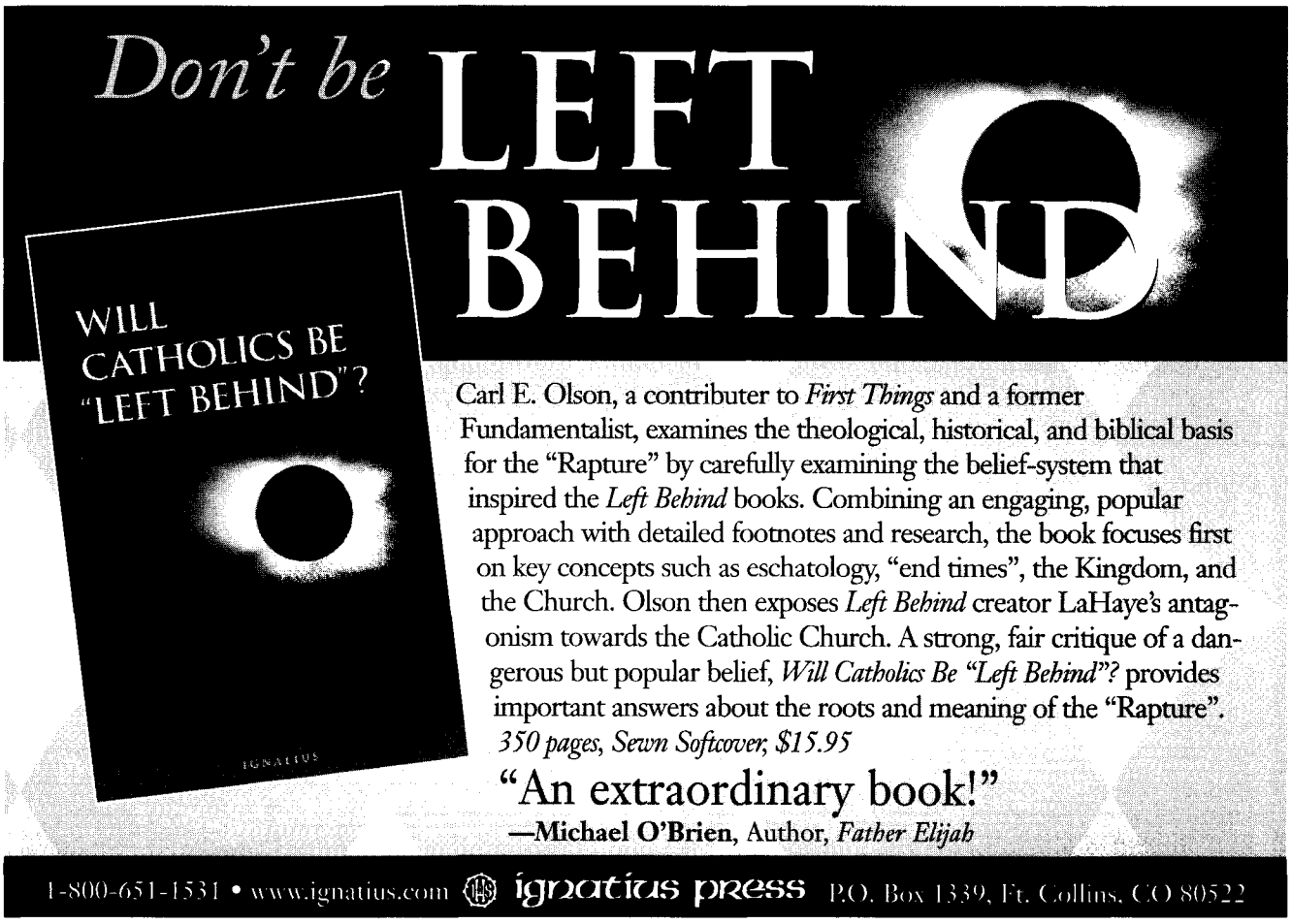
accurate understandings of human motivation. Particularly good is the account of Bunting's relationship with his clergyman father—the heart of the book—where some human depth is attempted and achieved. He has produced social comedy of a very high order, a novel of discomforting knowingness.

In two ways, however, the ideas are inconsequential: first in themselves; second in the part they play in the novel itself. There is an unseriousness at their core, a play-acting at existentialist angst. Bunting's dark night of the soul is a slightly gray afternoon in Durham, a north-of-England drizzle in the air. He wrestles, Dostoevsky-like, with the deepest agonies of Good and Evil, Light and Dark, then has a pale sherry and a nice cup of cocoa before bed. The reader is reminded of Mycroft Holmes, Sherlock Holmes' cleverer older brother, whose cleverness was always asserted, never shown. Likewise Bunting. We must take on trust his claim that cosmic questions really do tear at his inner being, leaving him orphaned in a howling universe. In fact, they are more like social inconveniences alienating him from various worlds (marriage, work, belief) whose cosiness and self-satisfaction he despises because he cannot achieve them himself. Which is cause and which effect—the unbelief or the adolescent revolt—Bunting seems unable to know. Readers may judge for themselves the emotional and intellectual seriousness of both.

This is, of course, intentional. Wood knows what he is about when he creates a character who seems to take ideas to heart but cannot quite conform to their real implications. To that extent *The Book Against God* is not against God or the godly, although it offers no comfort to either. The Divinity remains capriciously cruel, an absence masquerading as a presence in a world without sense; His followers remain delusional, clutching beads or songs or threadbare theologies, sad cases all. No: *The Book Against God* is actually "against" atheists themselves who lack the courage of their own atheism. Bunting's failure, Wood suggests, is to imagine that he may swap a gemütlich godliness for a gemütlich ungodliness; that the agreeable certainty of belief may give way to unbelief equally agreeable, equally hemmed in by pleasant social convention. Not so. Real thinkers prefer nihilism, Wood boasts, where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pointlessness is the point and unmeaning really means it.

The problem, alas, is that this paradox, like the novel itself, is its own refutation—playful, ironic, allusive, pithy, self-admiring, invincibly bourgeois. It is merely the Higher Smugness looking down on the Lower. Its one big idea is not much of an idea at all and is, in any case, conveyed by a plot and characters insufficiently strong to carry it. Thus the one irony the author did not intend: it is Wood, not Bunting, who lacks the courage of his nihilism, penning a novel whose very cleverness seems to invite approval, endorsement, a recognition of shared values and meaning. Form fatally undermines content—a real pity in a novel of real promise. In *The Book Against God* Barbara Pym meets Friedrich Nietzsche. Pym wins.

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BRIEFLY NOTED

STYLE AND FAITH: ESSAYS. By GEOFFREY HILL. *Counterpoint. 218 pp. $25.*

This slim but dense collection of Geoffrey Hill's recent essays is marked by a complex engagement with Anglo-Christianity and the English language. Many of these pieces are written against bumptious scholarship and facile tastes, and in defense of rarer qualities. It will surprise no one familiar with his poetry that Hill derides the premium that contemporary book culture places upon ensuring that readers are spared hard work or cultural embarrassment, particularly with regard to linguistic and religious matters. But while his poetry can be overly abstruse, his literary criticism is accessibly sophisticated, if not uniformly engaging. It is possible to appreciate Hill's deep commitment to affirming the inherent value of words while finding somewhat tiresome his extended excursions into etymological and philological aspects of English public writing from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Take his essay on the literary genealogies of Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which provides exhaustive (and exhausting) documentation—all for the sake of showing that Burton "conceive[d] his own work as a book of heaps out of a heap of books." Better is an essay on Henry Vaughan's "The Night," which amply rewards the high demands placed on the reader. After an elegant gloss of his own on John 3, the Scripture that inspired Vaughan, Hill conducts a well-paced close analysis of Vaughan's rhymes, leaving no doubt that the poet quite literally believed "his own words must be measured against, must chime faithfully with, the received words of Scripture." Hill rightly esteems Vaughan's commitment to harmonizing his words with the Word; he has sought to do likewise throughout his own career. This collection attests to his diligence in this admirable and, Hill would stress, necessary endeavor.

—Randy Boyagoda

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It is recommended that a lawyer help in drafting or amending a will.

MY STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM: A MEMOIR. By HANS KÜNG. *Eerdmans. 478 pp. $32.*

At age seventy-five, Catholicism's best-known theological dissenter has published a memoir that is an unmitigated embarrassment. The vulgarity of the author's self-aggrandizement is breathtaking, the viciousness toward those who dis-

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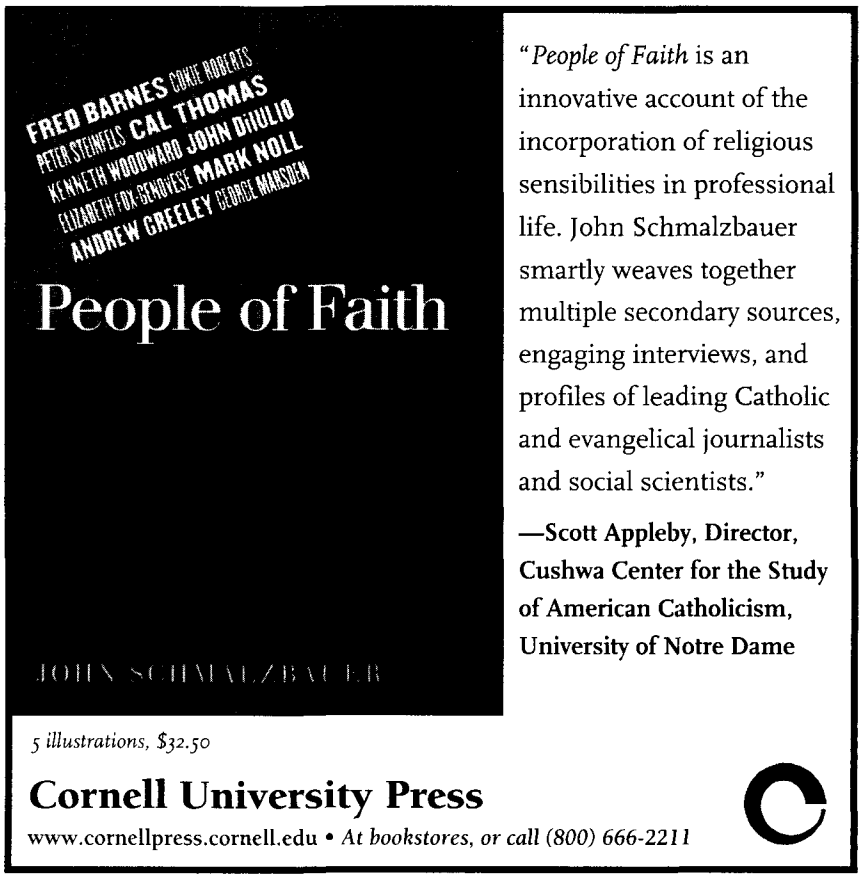
agree with him deeply saddening. He is the courageous warrior against "spiritual dictatorship" and "church totalitarianism." Unlike others who sold out in their ambition for ecclesiastical power and prestige, Hans Küng would not compromise his conscience. His most particular target is Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, but he names many others who are allegedly traitors to the truth. But never mind, he is happy and has found power and prestige elsewhere. He notes with satisfaction that Kofi Annan has accepted an invitation to his 75th birthday party. "In all modesty, which I have learned in my childhood, in the tumult of the times I have been able to assert myself as a free man, a Christian, and a theologian." The book ends with a letter from a Swiss pastor who compares him with the prophet Elijah. To which Küng responds, "Oh no, the fate of a professor is enough for me." There is that modesty again. Küng says he is writing a second volume of memoirs. It is a pity that what he describes as his great success in life did not include friends who might have discouraged him from publishing the first.

AMERICAN JESUS: HOW THE SON OF GOD BECAME A NATIONAL ICON. By STEPHEN PROTHERO. *Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 346 pp. $25.*

A frequently fascinating romp through American culture with the emphasis on pop culture (some would say there is no other kind), showing the myriad ways in which the figure of Jesus has been detached from theological or churchly connections to become an icon for the promotion of almost anything. America, says the author, is "a Jesus nation, not a Christian nation." He concludes with some heavy duty but undeveloped thoughts about the "immanentizing of the transcendent," suggesting that the marketing of the Holy Spirit, the most "immanent" of the persons of the Trinity, may be next in line for a popular makeover. The book is an interesting, although somewhat disjointed, exhibit that will find its place in departments of American Studies.

THE FAMILY IN THE MODERN AGE: MORE THAN A LIFESTYLE. By BRIGITTE BERGER. *Transaction. 244 pp. $39.95.*

A distinguished sociologist offers a rousing defense of the nuclear—she does not hesitate to say "bourgeois"—family. Turning conventional thinking upside down, Berger makes a persuasive case that the family, both historically and at present, is the producer and protector of liberal values. But of course. In sharp contrast to earlier tribal and feudal patterns, the bourgeois family made possible the freedom of a man and woman to choose each other, to live with their children in relative independence from wider kinship groups, and to form a bond in which obligation is reinforced by affection. Against the institution's detractors—from Marx to radical feminists to Michel Foucault's theories about oppressive "disciplining" mechanisms—the family provides the modern world with a zone of freedom joined to responsibility in a way that no other institution does or could. Berger adds to her socio-historical account an assessment of the current state of the nuclear family that will strike some readers as excessively sanguine. More attention might have been paid to the factors of class and race. While marriage and family are in fairly sturdy shape among college-educated whites, the nuclear family has almost disappeared among inner-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city blacks and appears to be in increasing trouble among working-class whites. That being said, however, *The Family in the Modern Age* is a scholarly treatise and manifesto that should be cheered by friends of liberal democracy. Liberal democracy rightly understood, of course.

ART'S PROSPECT: THE CHALLENGE OF TRADITION IN AN AGE OF CELEBRITY. By ROGER KIMBALL. *Ivan R. Dee. 246 pp. $26.*

Roger Kimball of the *New Criterion* is at it again, for which thoughtful readers should be grateful. This time the subject is how antitraditional art has itself become a tradition, and a not very interesting tradition at that. Far from being just another polemical rant, *Art's Prospect* takes us inside the heads of those who execute and market contemporary art, helping us understand what they

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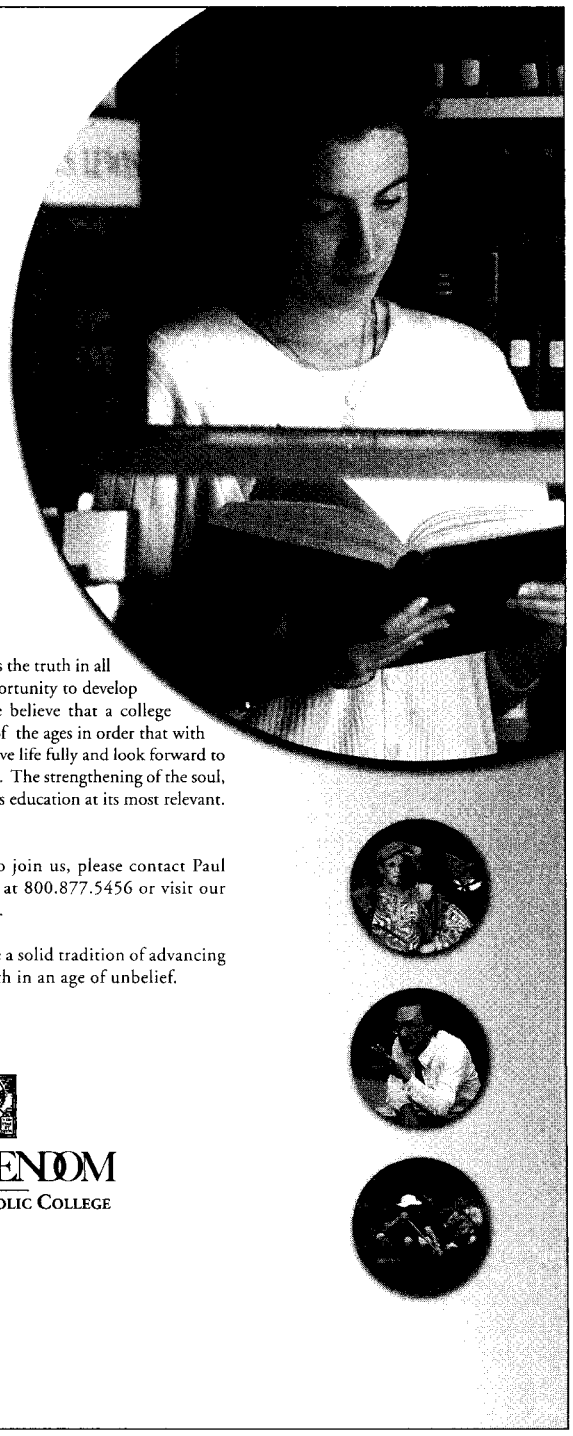

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think they are doing, and why doing it is such a profitable business. It is easy, and sometimes necessary, to ridicule what is currently celebrated in the world of the arts. Kimball takes on the more difficult task of explaining why art is so important to culture, and how its present debasement might be remedied.

Capital Punishment and Roman Catholic Moral Tradition. By E. Christian Brugger. *University of Notre Dame Press. 296 pp. $50.*

A professor of ethics at Loyola University, New Orleans, argues against the moral legitimacy of the death penalty, in agreement with statements of John Paul II that have been incorporated into the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. His argument is the more credible because he recognizes the gap, if not contradiction, between what appears to be current teaching and centuries of Christian tradition on this question. Brugger's goal is to suggest ways to more fully develop what he believes is a development of doctrine and thus close that gap. The book is a valuable contribution to the discussion of an unsettled and unsettling question.

A Moral Enterprise: Politics, Reason, and the Human Good. Edited by Kenneth L. Grasso and Robert P. Hunt. *ISI. 401 pp. $29.95.*

For more than half a century, Father Francis Canavan, S.J., has in his writing and teaching provided arguments both insightful and disturbing about moral reason and practice in our time. His students and friends bring together in this volume a tribute of essays testifying to Canavan's continuing influence. Not all are in agreement with Canavan. Historian George McKenna, for instance, suggests that he is undiscriminating in his critique of "liberalism," arguing that, in the past and at present, there are liberalisms in conflict. Other contributors include Hadley Arkes, who contends that legal positivism is not as bad as some other legal "isms" now regnant, and Gerard Bradley, who displays the ways in which "the pluralist game" is undermining clear thinking about marriage and related traditions. This is a superior Festschrift, filled with fresh ideas, and eminently well deserved.

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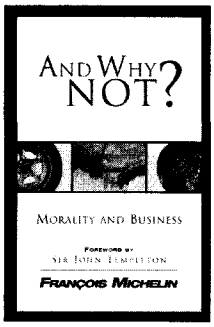

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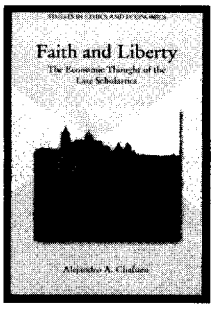

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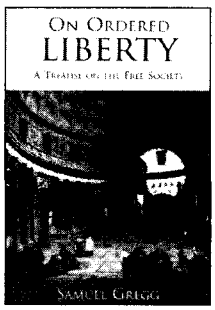

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By Samuel Gregg
Perhaps no greater question divides scholars, jurists, and statesmen than the nature of human liberty. While liberty is central to the claims of the Christian Gospel, the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and the American Revolution, discussions about its nature have been characterized by profound disagreement. What does it mean to be free? Why should man be free? What, if any, responsibilities accompany freedom? These matters are at the heart of *On Ordered Liberty*.
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A SERIOUS WAY OF WONDERING: THE ETHICS OF JESUS IMAGINED. By REYNOLDS PRICE. *Scribner. 146 pp. $23.*

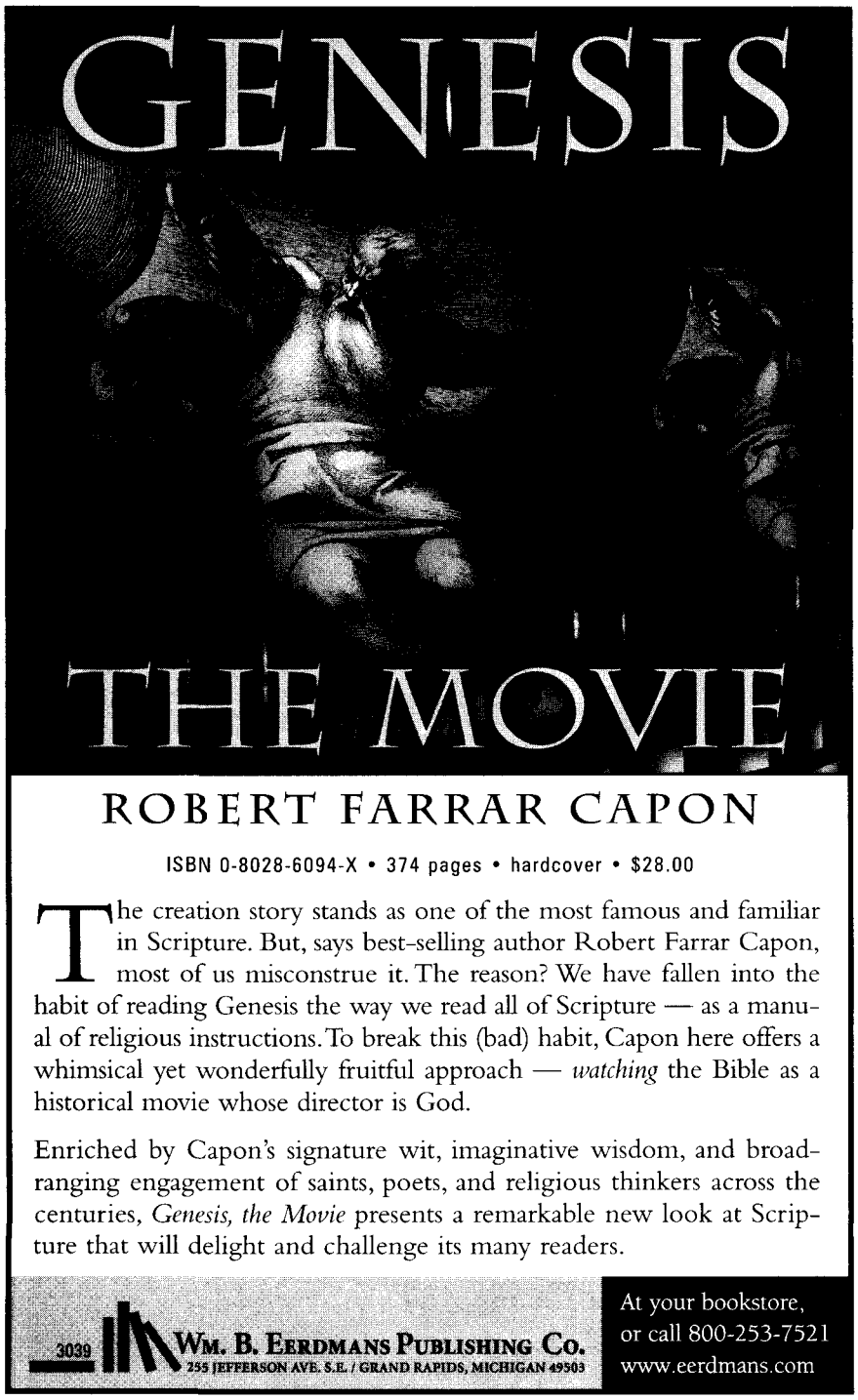
Novelist Reynolds Price calls himself an "outlaw Christian" and candidly acknowledges that he speaks with "no personal or institutional authority." What he does do, in a frequently captivating manner, is "imagine" what Jesus might have taught if Jesus agreed with him about homosexuality, suicide, and the oppression of women. The result is the imagined teaching of an imaginary Jesus, presented in a manner not untouched by the grace that keeps Mr. Price in loving contention with the Jesus of the Bible and the Church.

A PUBLIC FAITH: EVANGELICALS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT. Edited by MICHAEL CROMARTIE. *Rowman & Littlefield. 266 pp. $24.95 paper.*

The discussion about "civil society" has been going strong for more than a decade, but it seldom includes a firm grip on the part played by evangelical Protestants. In his introduction, John Wilson takes to task authors such as Robert Putnam (Bowling Alone) and Robert Bellah (Habits of the Heart) who perpetuate the myth that evangelical "Jesus and me" piety precludes constructive civic engagement. The thirteen essays here—covering education, welfare, abortion, bioethics, and other subjects—is a welcome corrective. Here and there, one detects a note of evangelical triumphalism, and almost all the authors complain that evangelicals are misunderstood, butthere are also some bracing criticisms of evangelicals by evangelicals. Putnam and Bellah are not entirely wrong, but there is a lot more to the story than their prejudices are willing to accommodate.

CULTURE OF LIFE—CULTURE OF DEATH. Edited by LUKE GORMALLY. *Linacre Center (Distributed by St. Augustine's Press). 342 pp. $25 paper.*

A collection of scholarly reflections on the title concepts, which were given currency by the 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. The discussions are comprehensive, including abortion, euthanasia, biomedical research, different ideas of human dignity, and the moral responsibilities of politicians. A book that will be welcomed by students of the many facets of the pro-life cause.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PRIEST. By MICHAEL S. ROSE. *Sophia. 185 pp. $14.95 paper.*

The author's *Goodbye, Good Men*, a best-seller that recounted the "homosexualizing" of the Catholic priesthood, caused a mighty stir. *Priest* is the other side of the story, an admiring portrait of priests who exemplify a joyful fidelity in serving God and His people. The journalistic adage that good news is no news should not go unchallenged. Hence this notice of Mr. Rose's good-news book.

ON THE PRIESTHOOD: CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY TEXTS. Edited by MATTHEW LEVERING. *Rowman & Littlefield. 148 pp. $19.95 paper.*

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JEWS AND CHRISTIANS: PEOPLE OF GOD. Edited by CARL E. BRAATEN and ROBERT W. JENSON. *Eerdmans. 195 pp. $18 paper.*

There has been for more than four decades a Jewish-Christian dialogue that is mainly a matter of intercommunal relations, and that is by no means unimportant. More important, however, has been another and seriously theological dialogue between Christians and Jews. What do we believe with and against one another? In what ways can we understand ourselves as one conflicted community of faith joined in desired obedience to the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus? This book is an admirable reflection of the state of that second dialogue. In addition to the editors, contributors include David B. Hart, Jon D. Levenson, George Lindbeck, Richard John Neuhaus, David Novak, and Wolfhart Pannenberg.

MARY: A CATHOLIC-EVANGELICAL DEBATE. By DWIGHT LONGENECKER and DAVID GUSTAFSON. *Brazos. 240 pp. $14.99 paper.*

Longenecker, the Catholic, and Gustafson, the evangelical Protestant, sometimes debate and sometimes puzzle together about the perduring and often strange role of the Mother of God in Christian faith and devotion. Both are theologically informed laymen who conduct their discussion in a way that provides easy entry for the general reader. Forewords by J. I. Packer and Richard John Neuhaus.

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THE PUBLIC SQUARE

A Continuing Survey of Religion, Culture, and Public Life

Richard John Neuhaus

THE SUPERFICIAL IN PURSUIT OF THE SUPERFICIAL

Alan Wolfe is director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston College. His latest book is further evidence of his right to be called the Alfred E. Neuman of the sociology of American religion. Like the mascot of *Mad* magazine, his all-purpose response is, "What, me worry?" The new book is *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith* (Free Press, 304 pp., $26). The literal minded might claim that the "Our" in the subtitle is fraudulent since Mr. Wolfe is not a person of faith. But that is to miss the point. Wolfe writes: "Let me confess right off that I do not write about religion out of religious conviction. Although raised to be proud of my Jewish ethnic heritage—I still remember the names of the Jewish major leaguers of my youth—I am not, and never have been, a person of faith. When it comes to religion, I hear no inner voices, am attracted to no supernatural explanations of everyday events, look neither upward to heaven nor downward to hell, identify with no particular tradition, and feel no untoward guilt in having married a Christian (by birth, though not by conviction) and having, together with her, raised three children without benefit of confirmations or bar and bat mitzvahs."

If all that is so, why is it not fraudulent for him to speak of how we actually live our faith? Because it is his position that American Christians, Jews, Muslims, and other religious folk—when it comes down to what they actually believe and live—share his faith. His faith and ours, Mr. Wolfe contends, is really in the American Way of Life. The summary argument of this book and Wolfe's many other writings is put succinctly: "In every aspect of the religious life, American faith has met American culture—and American culture has triumphed." Those familiar with the discussion will recognize that the argument is hardly original. The near classic reference in this connection is the 1955 book by the Jewish writer Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*. Hundreds of others have taken up the theme over the years and, indeed, every year hundreds of books are published advocating an "authentic" Christianity or Judaism capable of resisting the ravages of American culture. They agree with Wolfe that much of American religion has been dissolved into a tapioca pudding of vague spiritualities pandering to a consumerist society. The difference is that Wolfe thinks resistance to the culture, never mind transformation of the culture, is a lost cause, and the bigger difference is that he thinks that is a very good thing indeed. The happy outcome, in Wolfe's view, is that American culture has transformed religion.

A Clean Sweep

The title of Wolfe's concluding chapter gets to the heart of the matter: "Is Democracy Safe From Religion?" His emphatic answer is in the affirmative. Again and again he tells his nonreligious friends, especially in the academy and the media, to lighten up about "the religious right," conservative Catholics,

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and Christian "sectarians" who talk a hot game about the need to choose between Christ and the American Way of Life. Not to worry, says Wolfe. Even if they really mean it (and he seems doubtful about that), nobody is listening to them. Not, at least, when it comes to how people really live their lives. He writes: "Always in a state of transition, faith in the United States, especially in the last half century or so, has been further transformed with dazzling speed. Tracing the history of Christian thought from the New Testament to the twentieth century, the theologian H. Richard Niebuhr documented the many ways in which Christ could become a transformer of culture. But in the United States culture has transformed Christ, as well as all other religions found within these shores." The game is over, and religion as traditionally understood has lost. Secularists do not need to work so hard at maintaining the naked public square, Wolfe says. The free exercise of religion poses no threat. Religion's wings have been clipped, its rough edges smoothed. Religion in America has been unmanned, tamed, domesticated; it has been made safe for liberal democracy. And the wonderful thing is that the capitulation of religion to culture has been effected under the auspices of religion itself.

As I say, there are numerous Catholic, evangelical Protestant, and Jewish thinkers who agree with much of Wolfe's diagnosis. What they lament, however, he thinks we should celebrate. His celebration is not unqualified. There are wistful moments when he says he misses what has been lost. He prefers Bach to rock, and the intellectual acuteness of Jonathan Edwards to the banalities of Willow Creek and the church growth movement. While it is a good thing, he thinks, that nobody today takes doctrine seriously, he is manifestly impatient with institutions such as Fuller Seminary in California, where, he says, nobody dares to give offense by disagreeing with anything. (Still the wittiest and most incisive, although sometimes outrageously unfair, description of the wimpish vacuity of American religion is John Murray Cuddihy's 1978 book, *No Offense: Civil Religion and Protestant Taste*.)

While there is little that is new in Wolfe's book, and his substantive analysis is derivative, taken from scholars such as Robert Wuthnow and Nancy Ammerman, Wolfe writes with a journalistic flair, lacing his text with anecdotes from "field notes" supplied him by his graduate students. It is not unimportant, however, that Wolfe is treated as an authority on these matters by, among many others, the *New Republic* and the *New York Times*. Most of the present book is devoted to evangelicals, who offer the richest and most uninhibited displays of entrepreneurial enterprise in pitching their products to spiritual consumers called "seekers." Wolfe is not entirely free from the sneering snobbery that commonly marks discussions of evangelicaldom, but thoughtful evangelicals readily admit that their religious world offers a target-rich environment. Wolfe treats mainline Protestantism in a desultory fashion, except when it adopts evangelical tactics of self-promotion, in which case it is doubtfully mainline. He allows that Catholicism, with its belief in the Real Presence, and Orthodox Jews, who believe that God really did give the Law at Sinai, still offer a measure of cultural resistance, but they, along with the small Muslim communities, are coming around and will capitulate in short order. In sum, it is a clean sweep for the American Way of Life.

The anecdotes collected by Wolfe's graduate students are employed to demonstrate the pervasiveness of the Religion of Me. Readers of Robert Bellah's 1985 book, *Habits of the Heart*, will again and again recognize his Sheila, who practices her own religion of "Sheilaism." Wolfe is definitely not, in the phrase of Max Weber, religiously musical. And most of the people his field workers talk to are hardly theologians, philosophers, or poets. So, when someone says he goes to church because "It makes me feel better," Wolfe assumes he is saying pretty much what he would say about working out at the gym. In fact, were the fellow more theologically articulate, one might discover that what he means is something like this: "In church I am strengthened in my conviction that, through the Cross of Christ, I have been reconciled with God, the source and end of my life, and am sacramentally sustained in my struggle to love others as I am loved by God."

But Wolfe does not entertain that translation of "It makes me feel better." He insists that it is banality all the way down. And, of course, in many instances it may be banality all the way down. The striking thing is that from his perch at Boston College, reading books and field notes from graduate students, and making occasional personal forays to places such as Fuller and Wheaton, Alan Wolfe purports to know what is happening in the spiritual lives of millions upon millions of Americans. His writing is quite entirely untouched by curiosity about what William James called the varieties of religious experience.

The Transformation of American Religion is superficial sociology of superficial religion—or, more precisely, of religion that the author is determined to construe as superficial. Wolfe's faith commitment is to American liberal democracy and expressive individualism, and he is pleased to report

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that religion in America not only poses no threat to that commitment but is happily captive to that commitment. What is distinctively religious about religion in America is, in his view, epiphenomenal. The reality is that—despite all the vestigial baggage about doctrines, biblical authority, eternal salvation, earthly duties, and divinely instituted structures and sacraments—religious Americans are pretty much indistinguishable from the rest of us, meaning Alan Wolfe and people like him. "What, me worry?" Upon finishing the book, one is left with a question: Why does Mr. Wolfe devote his time to a subject that is, by his account, so singularly devoid of interest or importance?

FT

CONVERSATIONS WITH IRIS MURDOCH

"I feel like somebody who's living in a great big house and just occupies a tiny corner of it," Iris Murdoch wrote to a friend. But what great things she did in that tiny corner. A noted philosopher, her real work was the novel, although the two are hard to separate, even if she did object, as she did vehemently object, to the idea that she wrote "philosophical novels." I had quite forgotten how many of her twenty-six novels I had read over the years: *The Sandcastle*, *The Bell*, *A Severed Head*, *The Italian Girl*, *The Nice and the Good*, *The Black Prince*, *The Philosopher's Pupil* (maybe my favorite), *The Green Knight*, and more. In part because she wrote so many, I may have read more novels by Iris Murdoch than by any other twentieth-century writer.

This was brought to mind by the engaging new book edited by Gillian Dooley, *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction* (University of South Carolina Press, 300 pp., $34.95). It consists of twenty-three interviews with Iris Murdoch by sundry literary and media figures, dating from 1962 to 1996 when Alzheimer's was, as she said, putting her in a bad spot she couldn't get out of. Iris Murdoch died February 8, 1999. Among the most striking impressions is that of her unpretentiousness about her person and her work. In this, she puts one in mind of Flannery O'Connor. Writing is a gift and an art, the writer's craft is to tell a story, and the goal is to tell the truth. The obligation is not to instruct or to advance a cause, such as justice. Attend to truth, Murdoch says at one point, and justice will take care of itself. That she learned from her disillusionment with Marxism, in which, as a young woman, she had been briefly ensnared. I was a bit disappointed that, in all the discussions of authors whom she admired and by whom she was influenced, Flannery O'Connor is not mentioned once. Perhaps she had not read her. She repeatedly says she did not read much contemporary fiction.

Repeatedly and with devotion she refers to, I believe, the greatest of novelists, Dostoevsky. He is, she says, one of the "gods," and, while she knew she did not belong in that sparsely populated pantheon, his influence is, I think, manifest in her novels. She is God-obsessed, although she again and again says that she does not believe in God. At least not in the God of the Christianity that, she insists, she cherishes. One interviewer suggests that she is devoted to Christianity without God but has found that it doesn't work. Murdoch doesn't disagree. She cannot believe in a personal God, she says, because God cannot be "a thing among other things." That is disappointing. One learns in Christian Theology 101 that God is not a thing among things, an existent among existents, but the Absolute Being of all that is, was, or ever can be. But apparently Iris Murdoch did not learn that in her Anglo-Irish Protestant childhood. It is truly disconcerting how often this happens. One encounters people who say they do not believe in God only to discover, upon examination, that the God they do not believe in I do not believe in either. But it is especially disconcerting in someone of the intellectual stature of Iris Murdoch.

She ended up, it seems, in flirting with some kind of Buddhism that she hoped was somehow compatible with the Anglican liturgy she continued to attend. From her novels, I thought she was considerably more theologically literate and orthodox. It seems I was wrong. In the late 1980s, I invited her to give our annual Erasmus Lecture here in New York. She wrote the nicest letter explaining why she had to decline. Perhaps it was just as well.

There is one more thing about reading Gillian Dooley's fine book. It persuaded me that I was wrong to agree with those who charged her husband John Bayley with exploiting her and her final illness in his book *Elegy for Iris*. Iris Murdoch was a very private person, the critics said, and the book was a gross violation of her privacy. *From a Tiny Corner* suggests that she was not so private as some thought. As she relentlessly explored the inner life of her characters, so she was far from averse to speaking candidly about the complexities of her self. More important, from the touching glimpses one gets in this book of John Bayley's care for her in her fragility, it is obvious that he

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could have done nothing that was not for the love of Iris. I don't know when, there are so many things awaiting attention, but I have no doubt I will go back to read her again.

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THEN AND NOW

Both embarrassment and reassurance come from recalling what you said or wrote many years ago. The embarrassment is in recognizing how often you have repeated yourself over the years. The reassurance is in recognizing the continuity of your thought. A different embarrassment is in being reminded that you said some pretty dumb things. Recently I lectured at the University of Virginia under the auspices of the St. Anselm Institute, an organization devoted to promoting the Christian intellectual tradition. Professor Robert Louis Wilken introduced me. We have known one another for fifty years, since we were freshmen in college. In his generous, and delightfully extended, introduction, he quoted from an article I published in *Commonweal* in June 1967, "The Dangerous Assumptions."

Speaking on the pro-life circuit, I have frequently alluded to that article, but I had not actually reread it for decades. In 1967, the Blumenthal bill, aimed at liberalizing abortion law, was a subject of heated contention in the New York legislature. Seven years before *Roe v. Wade*, New York, like most states, permitted abortion only in the instance of direct threat to the life of the mother. Until I read the article again, I had forgotten how much my concern was prompted by the ecumenical and interreligious rancor caused by the abortion debate. And I was reminded again how totally leftist was the religious leadership of the time, or at least the leadership deserving of notice in my world of discourse then. In the article, I deplored the conflict over abortion law between *Commonweal* and the now defunct *Christianity and Crisis*, a publication associated with Reinhold Niebuhr of the now almost defunct Union Theological Seminary. In fact, I noted, the entirety of the Protestant and Jewish religious establishments was arrayed against the Catholic Church on this issue. I expressed the hope that "perhaps the debate can be prevented from degenerating to the level of religious power politics." "Without the mutual assumption of good faith," I wrote, "there is little hope for anything but wasting polemics."

I took some swipes at the Catholic bishops for failing to condemn the Vietnam war as clearly as I thought they should, and for confusing the issues of abortion and artificial contraception, but on the Blumenthal bill I suggested the bishops were right. I wrote of the logical extension of the pro-abortion logic to euthanasia, eugenics, and a war against the poor and "unwanted." While advocates of liberalized abortion denied they had such things in mind, I wrote, "Measures of social change are reasonably evaluated in view of their probable end results. Our century has witnessed the demonic consequences of man's distorted definitions of himself along racist, nationalistic, and utilitarian lines. Nothing can be taken for granted in terms of society's understanding of human rights. In our valuations of human life, to be civilized is to be conservative."

I am not sure, but that may be the first time I intimated in print that I might be, in some significant sense of the term, a conservative. There is no doubt that the question of abortion, more than any other single factor, precipitated my breaking ranks with the leftist liberalism of my youth. "How flexible can we be with regard to abortion," I wrote, "is tantamount to asking how flexible we can be with regard to taking human life. . . . Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Jews have much to discuss before abortion is debated again in the legislative arena. I have attempted to suggest a few items for the agenda and to make clear that abortion is not a peculiarly Roman Catholic hang-up. The abortion question goes to the center of our vision of man and of the human community for which we hope."

Of course the legislative debates in the several states—which, contrary to what is usually claimed, were moving against liberalized abortion law—would soon be nullified by the imperial edict of the Supreme Court. But my argument in that article, as in countless articles and speeches since then, is that liberalism had planted its flag on the wrong side of the divide over abortion. In the last half century, nothing has had more momentous consequences for the reconfiguration of our public life, including the moral and political decline of what is now called liberalism.

So I'm grateful that my friend Wilken went to the university library to pull out that ancient article. Reading it now, I'm a little embarrassed, particularly by my dumb dismissal of the importance of defending "conventional sexual mores." But mostly—about liberalized abortion law and what it would entail for society, and especially for the poor—I am reassured. Not, to be sure, reassured about the subsequent influence of the argument I tried to make then. But reassured that, with some minor editing, it is the argument that I want to make, and must make, until my dying breath.

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EAST MEETS WEST, SORT OF

I first met the Dalai Lama in 1979. He was not then the celebrity that he is now. In 1950 the People's Liberation Army of China had invaded Tibet and brutally subjected its people, while the Dalai Lama fled to Dharamsala in northern India where he set up a Tibetan government in exile. A few of his Tibetan followers had established a Free Tibet committee here in the U.S. and came to see me at what was then called the Council on Religion and International Affairs, where I served as Senior Editor of *Worldview*, the council's magazine. They asked if I would help bring Tibet's plight to public attention, and suggested that a service at St. Patrick's Cathedral with the then Cardinal Archbishop, Terence Cooke, might be one way to do that. I took the matter up with Monsignor James Rigney, the rector of the cathedral, who obtained the agreement of Cardinal Cooke.

A few days before the scheduled event, there was a flurry of communications between Rome and New York. The Holy See was understandably concerned that the service not suggest a false "syncretism" between Buddhism and Catholicism. With precisely that in mind, we were assiduously careful in planning the songs, ceremonies, and forms of prayer, and Cardinal Cooke's address, while very gracious, explicitly underscored the fundamental differences between Buddhism and the Catholic faith. The cathedral was packed and two ornate chairs were set in front, one for the Dalai Lama and one for the Cardinal. To the obvious embarrassment of the Cardinal, the Dalai Lama reached over and grasped his hand, which he held throughout most of the two-hour event. The photo of the two sitting together and holding hands graced the top of the front page of the *New York Times* the next day. He did not tell me so, but I was given to understand that Cardinal Cooke was not entirely pleased by the occasion.

Later, John Cardinal O'Connor, then archbishop, invited me to breakfast with the Dalai Lama, and we had an extended and wide-ranging discussion about America, the situation in Tibet, and his hopes for his people. By then the Dalai Lama was becoming, somewhat to his discomfort, I believe, the Dalai Lama Inc., surrounded by movie stars and other celebrities basking in what they had turned into the designer spirituality of Hollywood's version of Tibetan Buddhism. The Dalai Lama in person is anything but overwhelming, unless, of course, one believes he is the incarnation of the Buddha and, as many of his followers say, "a living god." He is very modest, polite, and given to interspersing his usually broken English with what are best described as self-deprecating giggles. One senses an inner peace combined with a view that the ways of the world are inexhaustibly funny.

This was evident at the late September gathering with 65,000 admirers in Central Park, where he was introduced by actor Richard Gere, who pronounced him to be "one of the great beings ever to walk on this planet." The Dalai Lama began his informal remarks by saying with a chuckle, "I have nothing to offer, no special thing. Just some blah, blah, blah, blah." He went on to say, "More compassion automatically opens our inner self. Too much self-centered attitude closes our inner door." The crowd cheered lustily when he observed, "The very concept of war is out of date. Destruction of your neighbor as an enemy is essentially a destruction of yourself." Earlier in the week, he had told the editors of the *New York Times* that it is right for a country to defend itself against attackers who are driven by "negative emotions." And an op-ed article in the *Times* by a supporter of Tibetan freedom was implicitly critical of him for letting himself be used by admirers who have no serious interest in either Buddhism or the welfare of Tibet. Patrick French, formerly a director of the Free Tibet Campaign, wrote, "Some of the books that purport to be written by the Dalai Lama are scarcely by him at all, but have his face on the cover to increase sales." He also wrote that "the Dalai Lama explicitly condemns homosexuality, as well as all oral and anal sex. His stand is close to that of Pope John Paul II, something his Western followers find embarrassing and prefer to ignore." French says that the Dalai Lama agreed to the publisher's excising from the book *Ethics for the New Millennium* his strictures against homosexuality lest they offend American readers.

The Dalai Lama was unusually straightforward, however, in a recent conference in Madrid. He had just met again with Pope John Paul II and was asked whether they discussed creating some kind of synthesis between Christianity and Buddhism. Nothing of the sort, he said. "People from different traditions should keep their own, rather than change. However, some Tibetan may prefer Islam, so he can follow it. Some Spanish prefer Buddhism; so follow it. But think about it carefully. Don't do it for fashion. Some people start Christian, follow Islam, then Buddhism, then nothing. In the United States I have seen people who embrace Buddhism like they change their clothes. Like the New Age. They take something Hindu, something Buddhist, something, something. . . . That is not healthy. Having one truth, one religion, is very important. Several truths, several religions, is contradictory."

There is no doubt that the Dalai Lama is an important religio-political phenomenon. While the U.S.

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and other nations are not likely to risk serious trouble with China over it, the Dalai Lama has succeeded in keeping the oppression of Tibet on the international agenda, even if at the margins. And I am sure that, among all the glitterati and spirituality groupies surrounding him, some people have been led to an authentic engagement with Tibetan Buddhism. From the Dalai Lama's viewpoint, that would, I suppose, be no little achievement.

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NO END OF DEBATE ABOUT THE END OF DEMOCRACY

When, in November 1996, we ran a symposium on the judicial usurpation of politics, *Commentary* magazine countered with a symposium on the symposium, with most of their contributors suggesting that we had gone over the edge. Now the October *Commentary* has another symposium, "Has the Supreme Court Gone Too Far?" The introduction notes that "the editors of FIRST THINGS were suggesting that the process had reached crisis proportions and was leading to 'the end of democracy.'" In light of subsequent decisions and especially this year's rulings on affirmative action (*Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Gratz v. Bollinger*) and sodomy (*Lawrence v. Texas*), the editors of *Commentary* write, "The specter has been raised of, if not the end of democracy, at least the end of constitutional law."

The new symposium includes constitutional scholars and commentators reflecting a broad spectrum of views. Robert Bartley, Editor Emeritus of the *Wall Street Journal*, compares the abortion decisions with the infamous *Dred Scott* decision and writes, "In those cases, the Court no doubt sacrificed some of its legitimacy, and no doubt the high ideals of the law were besmirched. But somehow the Republic survived." He thinks the remedy is to be found not in limiting the judicial branch but in the general political process. "By the nature of lifetime tenure, the judiciary is often the last branch to register a new era in society's opinion. That is why the judiciary is the last hope of the liberal consensus that prevailed from FDR through JFK." But those days are now over. "Critics intent on changing the judiciary should put their efforts into changing the balance of public opinion and of political power."

William J. Bennett, former Secretary of Education, notes the ways in which the Court has undermined the family and the constituting principles of the society. He observes that Jefferson and Madison called the Declaration of Independence the first "act of Union" and recommended its study in law schools. "As far as I am aware," writes Bennett, "no elite law school today teaches the Declaration as 'organic law,' even though its understanding of equality and freedom is central to any proper appreciation of the Constitution." It is a mistake, he says, to nominate for the courts people who can be easily confirmed. "It is a mistake to shrink from a fight over a confirmation—after all, it is the Constitution we are fighting for."

Robert H. Bork develops arguments he has made in FT, and also in his most recent book, *Coercing Virtue* (on which more later in these pages). "Judicial invention of new and previously unheard-of rights accelerated over the past half century and has now reached warp speed," he says. He notes the growing tendency of the Supreme Court to cite decisions by foreign courts. "That, to put it gently, is flabbergasting. What the decisions of foreign courts have to do with what the framers and ratifiers of the U.S. Constitution understood themselves to be doing is not explained, and cannot be explained." The left cites *Bush v. Gore*, the decision that overruled the Florida Supreme Court in the 2000 presidential election, as an instance of conservative judicial activism. To which Bork responds, "Correcting a constitutional error is not judicial activism." The judiciary, he says, is "an untethered power that overrides democratic governance whenever the mood strikes it." He sees no remedy in Article III's provision that Congress can limit the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. That would only leave jurisdiction with the states, and "many state courts have become as unrestrained and trendy as the federal courts." His conclusion: "In short, there appears to be no way to contain the imperial judiciary."

Pervasive Hypocrisy?

Alan Dershowitz of Harvard says the discussion of the imperial judiciary is marked by "pervasive hypocrisy on all sides." Liberals and conservatives alike are more interested in the results of a decision than in whether it was decided on legitimate constitutional grounds. An instance of "judicial activism" is any decision one dislikes. "There is no perfect solution to the paradox of judicial review, the conundrum of states' rights in a federal republic, or the mystery of original intent." The paradox, conundrum, and mystery have been with us from the beginning, so we might as well get used to it.

Lino A. Graglia of the law school at the University of Texas is exceedingly impatient with such sugges-

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tions of symmetry between right and left. In instance after instance, he writes, the Court is addressing not constitutional law but "policy choices," and, in instance after instance, the Court decides that it knows best. Here is Graglia at cruising speed: "Virtually every one of the Court's rulings of unconstitutionality over the past fifty years—on abortion, capital punishment, criminal procedure, busing for school racial balance, prayer in the schools, government aid to religious schools, public display of religious symbols, pornography, libel, legislative reapportionment, term limits, discrimination on the basis of sex, illegitimacy, alien status, street demonstrations, the employment of Communist-party members in schools and defense plants, vagrancy control, flag burning, and so on—have reflected the views of this same elite. In every case, the Court has invalidated the policy choice made in the ordinary political process, substituting a choice further to the political left. Appointments to the Supreme Court and even to lower courts are now more contentious than appointments to an administrative agency or even to the Cabinet—matters of political life or death for the cultural elite—because maintaining a liberal activist judiciary is the only means of keeping policymaking out of the control of the American people."

Graglia notes that in some of its most controversial decisions, the Court appeals to an "emerging democratic consensus." But, by preempting the role of the legislature, it prevents that putative consensus from being put to the test of democratic debate and vote. Surveying the ways proposed for countering the imperial judiciary, Graglia thinks it comes down to political will: "The system of checks and balances set up by the Constitution has broken down where the Supreme Court is concerned; that institution now checks but is not checked by the other branches. President Lincoln dealt with the abuse of judicial power by announcing that although he would not defy the Court's *Dred Scott* decision, neither would he accept it as settling the slavery issue. Congress and the President could similarly make clear that contemporary Supreme Court rulings of unconstitutionality without basis in the Constitution deserve not respect but censure. If the political will were there, means could be found to return the country to the experiment in popular self-government in a federalist system with which we began."

William Kristol, editor of the *Weekly Standard*, also looks to politics for "a revival of constitutionalism." He notes that at least two appointments to the Supreme Court will be coming up in the fairly near future. "Could a Bush second term transform the judiciary in the way FDR's second term did? Not likely. But, perhaps, possible." Sanford Levinson, also of the University of Texas, speaks about "catholic" and "protestant" approaches to constitutionalism. The current Court is "papalist," issuing edicts from the top down, and he suggests one remedy is for Congress to be more assertive in giving definition to the Constitution. Another is to limit justices to nonrenewable eighteen-year terms, which would mean a new appointment every two years. Dahlia Lithwick is legal correspondent for *Slate*, and she suggests we stop worrying: "Indeed, judges have been deciding cases without regard for the law ever since King Solomon ruled that the contending parties should split that baby. What aspect of today's crisis over the 'imperial judiciary' is, therefore, new and terrifying? Nothing, it seems, but the nomenclature."

Still worried, however, is Jeffrey Rosen, who writes on legal affairs for the *New Republic*. He generally agrees with the Court's decisions but thinks they are often made on doubtful grounds. Yet a judicial retreat can be forced when the Court gets too far ahead of the country. "The conservative counter-reaction to *Roe*," he writes, "ultimately failed in its attempt to force such a retreat because, by 1992, a majority of the country had come to accept the moderate compromise that *Roe* represented—namely, that early-term abortions had to be protected and late-term abortions could be restricted." In fact, and as Rosen should know after three decades of public discussion, *Roe* decreed a de facto unlimited right to abortion for any reason at any point of pregnancy, and the Court later made explicit that this includes killing a child in the very process of being born. But Rosen does think judicial imperialism is a problem, and he opines that the *Lawrence* decision on gay rights may force the kind of retreat that *Roe* failed to effect. "If the country cares enough about an issue," he writes, "the Court will retreat on its own."

Cass R. Sunstein teaches law at the University of Chicago and he agrees that the Court overreached in *Lawrence*, although he celebrates the result. Such overreaching is bad, "But it would be hysterical to suggest that the Court has subverted the constitutional order, and there is no reason to take new steps to reduce its authority." So the Court has erred from time to time. To which Prof. Sunstein remarks, "To err is human." Like other contributors, George Weigel of the Ethics and Public Policy Center cites the Court's "sweet mystery of life passage" from *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* of 1992: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of life." That passage, cited by the Court again in *Lawrence*, declares, says Weigel, that "the state's sole interest in sexual matters among con-

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senting adults is to protect the unfettered expression of personal autonomy." It puts faithful Christians and Jews on notice: "There is a new and jealous god in the land: the imperial autonomous Self." Those who serve another God, such as William Pryor who has been nominated for the federal bench, are disqualified by what Senator Charles Schumer calls their "deeply held beliefs." Weigel, unlike Bork, thinks a remedy might be to limit the Court under Article III, which could restore "a measure of robustness to the noble American experiment in democratic self-governance."

Marching to the Netherlands

Finally, the distinguished social scientist James Q. Wilson weighs in with particular attention to *Lawrence*. He notes that the decision invoked the European Court of Human Rights, which involves twenty-one European nations, in support of an international consensus on gay rights, but "it chose to ignore the hostility to sodomy in nations with far larger populations like China, India, Korea, and most African countries." Wilson doesn't say so, but the Court seems to suggest that an international consensus means a consensus among "our kind of people," and then only the enlightened elites among them. He does say that the Court majority backs "the libertarian view that no state has the authority to restrict conduct affecting only one's self and one's consenting partner." It follows that "there could be no state law against prostitution, bestiality, heroin consumption, physician-assisted suicide, or gay marriage." Wilson thinks that banning or restricting prostitution is good public policy and wonders what the Court would have done in the Texas case had one gay man paid the other for his services.

Beginning with the *Griswold* contraception case in 1965, the Court's sex-related decisions, Wilson writes, have usually gestured toward the importance of marriage as an institution. "The Court held that the state could still treat extramarital sex and nonmarital sex as evils. After *Lawrence*, all of those genuflections toward marriage have become moot." On all the policy choices he mentions, Wilson notes, the Netherlands has adopted the above-mentioned libertarian principle. He thinks the odds are against the passage of a Federal Marriage Amendment. A successful amendment requires not just a majority but an overwhelming majority. Which leads him to his final and doleful thought: "The Court is marching us toward the Netherlands—only there, at least, politicians and not six robed jurists made the decisions."

The *Commentary* symposium is a valuable contribution. Among other things, it indicates that since the 1996 FT symposium, and with generous assistance from sundry court rulings, more thoughtful people are beginning to ponder the end of democracy. Or at least "the end of constitutional law," which is another way of saying the end of democracy. For many on the left, the view seems to be that judicial imperialism is a myth (except for *Bush v. Gore*), or, if not a myth, a debatably legitimate way of producing happy results. Conservatives, they say, would drop their complaint if the results went their way. So face it: we're all hypocrites. On the right, there is deep despondency mixed with spurts of cheerleading for the next election. I agree with James Q. Wilson that there is not now an overwhelming majority for the Marriage Amendment, but that campaign is just starting and will likely be accelerated dramatically when a court, federal or state, invents a right to gay marriage. And I'm inclined to favor a closer look at Article III, the invocation of which would serve as a sobering reprimand to the Supreme Court, with reverberations throughout the judicial system.

Our 1996 symposium used the phrase, "the judicial usurpation of politics." The answer to the usurpation of politics is the reassertion of politics. Abraham Lincoln understood that when, in his First Inaugural, he said that *Dred Scott* may have settled a particular case but it in no way settled the principle. The Supreme Court may have made its peace with slavery, but it did not and could not speak for the people. As the discussion of the threatened end of democracy continues and intensifies, we would all be well advised to commit to memory the words of Lincoln: "The candid citizen must confess that if the policy of the government upon vital questions affecting the whole people is to be irrevocably fixed by decisions of the Supreme Court . . . the people will have ceased to be their own rulers, having to that extent practically resigned their government into the hands of that eminent tribunal."

FT

WHILE WE'RE AT IT

■ A priest writes that he just had dinner with ten of his parishioners. He describes them as "the best of Generation X." They are at Mass every Sunday, they are elite educated high-achievers, all under forty, involved in reading, sports, politics, and the rearing of their children. You get the idea. The priest writes: "I give you this background to help you appreciate the full force of this: these bright young Catholics

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have great contempt for the American episcopate. They expressed total incomprehension at the weakness and folly of the leadership being provided by the bishops, not just in the sexual abuse crisis but in the life of the Church generally. 'Do you know how hard it is to find a safe place to go to Mass when we're on the road, Father? Don't the bishops care that the liturgy has been hijacked by silliness?' 'Why doesn't the bishop do something about the sterilizations at the Catholic hospital?' And so on. Much of my time is spent with the very old, the very young, the very sick, or the very troubled, so to spend an evening with bright, engaged people who are seeking to follow Christ was a great delight. To discover that they are sorely disappointed in our bishops precisely because they hold that office in such high regard was a bit surprising; I suppose I had assumed that only priests and the cognoscenti fret over such things. These Gen X's are the agents of the New Evangelization; they deserve competent leadership they can respect."

■ The peninsula projects into the Aegean Sea from the coast of Macedonia and terminates in Mount Athos ("the Holy Mountain"). In A.D. 961, St. Athanasius the Athonite founded a monastery there, and in the centuries since there have been twenty Orthodox monasteries. They are the guardians of some of the most precious art and venerable traditions of Orthodoxy. No woman may set foot on the holy mount. Nor a female cat, dog, or chicken. Now a plenary session of the European Parliament has overwhelmingly declared that 1,042 years of discrimination against women is enough. The Greek members of the parliament abstained from the vote. The deputy foreign minister of Greece says the parliament's demand "would be in direct confrontation with fundamental, 1,000-year-old traditions, our faith, and the monastic spirit of the Mountain." To be sure, respond the parliamentarians, but gender equality is worth such a confrontation, and gender equality is trump. The Greeks are standing fast, sort of. This report does not say whether the parliamentary resolution mentions cats, dogs, or chickens.

■ To speak of a cardinal as *papabile* is to say that he is thought to be a lively candidate for pope. Godfried Cardinal Danneels of Belgium, age seventy, is *papabile*. But that's not the occasion for this comment because: so are a lot of other cardinals; the discussion of who will succeed any pope begins the day after his election; and this pope will quite possibly be in office for years to come. The occasion for this comment is a recent statement by the Cardinal at a press conference. He is asked, "You say that secularization is in essence a good thing, but it reduces the number of Catholics dramatically." He answers: "Secularization forces one to make a very conscious choice about one's beliefs. One is no longer a Catholic by birth. That is good. I think that a moral choice is more perfect when it is made by a free man. And I prepare myself for a smaller Church because I know very well that a decision made freely is always more demanding than being one of the herd." Other Church leaders in Western Europe, including the revered Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, have said similar things. I am not persuaded. In countries such as France or Germany that have experienced such a devastating collapse in Christian faith and practice, the temptation is to try to make a virtue of necessity. I'm not clear on how being reconciled to, or even enthusiastically embracing, "a smaller Church" squares with John Paul II's persistent calls for a "New Evangelization" and a "Reevangelization" of previously Christian cultures. The more interesting observation, however, is that such things are said by European leaders who are typically critical of what they depict as the radical individualism of America's mainly Protestant culture. Apart from a few imitators of Harvey Cox's "secular city" argument of the 1960s, Catholics in this country do not speak about secularization as a good thing. As for being "a Catholic by birth" (and baptismal rebirth) Americans speak with pride and gratitude about being "cradle Catholics." Cardinal Danneels refers disparagingly to being "one of the herd." Catholic Americans rejoice in being part of large and flourishing parishes which, in turn, are part of the largest and most rapidly growing religious community in the country, despite its many vicissitudes. So the question is: Just who are the Catholics most deeply infected by Protestant individualism? Father Andrew Greeley says that many Catholic Americans are only "communal Catholics," but Catholicism is by definition communal. That is as true in Belgium as it is anywhere else. The necessities of the Church in Western Europe are indeed dispiriting, but, with due respect to His Eminence, it seems doubtful that the answer is to be found in something other than Catholicism. That Western Europe is, by almost any index, dying is no longer news. In Belgium, according to a recent report, one out of ten people have attempted suicide. Suicide kills more people than traffic accidents. Those who make the big decisions of life "freely," without the support and guidance of tradition and culture, are, more often than not, part of what Harold Rosenberg called the herd of independent minds. Their destination is typically not a happy one.

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■ Not surprisingly, a lot of these stories are coming across my desk these days. David Warren's is representative. He is a popular columnist with the *Ottawa Citizen*, and he writes about his decision to become a Roman Catholic. "My own beliefs, since I was received into that church more than twenty years ago on my final graduation from secular humanism, were represented by my membership in the Anglican Church. I took this to be a catholic church, with at least a small-c, and was attracted to the 'high' end of the vessel, and to the gorgeous liturgy of Cranmer, to Tractarian principles, and to the great philosophical and holy minds that had decorated Anglicanism over the centuries—from Richard Hooker, Lancelot Andrewes, and Jeremy Taylor in its 'golden age,' to men like C. S. Lewis, and Eric Mascall, and Austin Farrer in the last century. I shall always cherish these men, I am incapable of doubting their sincerity, and will carry their echoes in our fine English tongue. And so much that was patient, and Godly, and disciplined, in the Anglican Communion." He notes that the gay Episcopal bishop-elect of New Hampshire has declared, "Just because Scripture and tradition say something is wrong that doesn't necessarily mean it's wrong." The bishops in solemn assembly agreed and authorized his consecration. They were, they said, being led by the Holy Spirit. "It is," writes Warren, "the characteristic doctrine of utopian revolutionaries and violent heretics from many centuries—this idea that God is speaking to them directly, and that they may now ignore Scripture, history, and tradition, and do whatever feels right." Warren concludes with this: "Yet I do not look back in anger, but in heartbreak, at the wreckage remaining from what was a fine four- or five-century run. Within the ruin of the Anglican Church, we will find so many beautiful things, embodying noble aspirations. We will not, however, find the Catholic succession—for Anglicanism has become one of those channels of history that runs out, as so many of the churches of the past, which lost their way, and sank into the sands. It is too early to go into my reasons for crossing the Tiber. I don't even know all of them, yet; one begins to discover reasons one never suspected, in the moment the decision is made. I am fully aware the Roman Catholic Church is also under bombardment from postmodernity, and mine in part is an act of faith that the center will hold; that men like the present pope, and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, and their successors, will hold the fort of authentic Christian doctrine against every enticement to abandon it. They will, if God shall will; and in my small way I intend to hold it with them." Missing from the statements of some who have made the same decision is Warren's important admission that he does not yet know all the reasons for the decision. It is enough to know where the reasons are to be found.

■ My friend Stanley Hauerwas of Duke should have been there. He likes to call himself a high-church Mennonite. The Bruderhof is not exactly Mennonite, but it is most definitely in the Anabaptist tradition. Established in 1920 in Germany by Eberhard Arnold and now led by Johann Christof Arnold, the Bruderhof currently has communities in New York, Pennsylvania, Germany, Austria, and Australia in which married and single people live a life of poverty and radical obedience to their understanding of the gospel of Jesus. A few years ago I had a part in interesting the late Cardinal O'Connor and Cardinal Cassidy, then head of the pontifical council for Christian unity, in the Bruderhof's desire for a closer relationship with the Catholic Church. Catholics, along with Lutherans and Calvinists in Europe, fiercely persecuted the Anabaptists, and for four hundred years there had been few efforts at reconciliation. There has been nothing like the signing last August 19 of "A Call to Purity" by the Bruderhof community of Ulster County, New York, and the Archdiocese of New York. The statement is a vibrant call for moral fidelity, and especially sexual fidelity, in a culture that has largely forgotten the meaning of the word. It begins with the assertion: "The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York and the Bruderhof believe that God has intervened in human history—decisively—in the birth of His only son Jesus Christ, in his life, teaching, crucifixion, and resurrection. We view that intervention to be the pivot upon which human history turns and the salvific moment of victory from darkness into light." Sociologists such as Alan Wolfe will, of course, see "A Call to Purity" as yet further evidence that the feel-good spirituality of the American Way of Life has trumped the doctrinal differences that once made a difference, even to the point of religious warfare. They are wrong. The measure of reconciliation indicated by the August signing is, rather, another sign of deep Christian conviction creating common cause, not least in countering the sexual hysteria that afflicts the American Way of Life.

■ Robert Pickus turned eighty on October 31, one day short of All Saints' Day. George Weigel thinks that is appropriate since "Pick," as everyone calls him, is not yet a saint but is on his way. Fifty years ago Pick dedicated his life to building "a peace effort worthy of the name," and in the late 1970s he recruit-

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ed the young Weigel to work for his improbably named World Without War Council. That put Weigel on the way to making his many contributions to our thinking about what St. Augustine called *tranquillitas ordinis*—the peace of right order—and its implications for the just war tradition. During the "peace movements" of recent decades, which have often been neither peaceful nor conducive to world peace, Robert Pickus has defended the honorable tradition of a liberal realism that challenges both the cynic and the utopian. The world will never be without war but the World Without War Council has taught many to accept that sobering reality without being paralyzed in their work for peace. At eighty, Pick keeps on teaching. *Ad multos annos.*

■ In an article in the *Cumberland Law Review*, Bill Pryor, Attorney General of Alabama, responds to the supporters of Chief Justice Roy Moore who accuse him of selling out by backing the federal court injunction against the display of the Ten Commandments. "There was no moral justification for civil disobedience," writes Pryor. "My oath to uphold the U.S. Constitution required me, as Attorney General of Alabama, to obey the injunction without regard to whether I agreed with the basis for that injunction." In the article and on many other occasions, Pryor makes it luminously clear that the federal court is wrong, that it is perfectly constitutional to display the Ten Commandments on government property, as, in fact, it is displayed in many places. Pryor's article is titled "Christian Duty and the Rule of Law," and it admirably reflects both biblical teaching on lawful authority and the meaning of civil disobedience as set forth by Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King in his classic "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Pryor writes, "Removing the monument of the Ten Commandments from the building of the government did not require me or another official to violate a Christian duty. Christ did not command us to maintain a monument of the Ten Commandments in the rotunda of the State Judicial Building. The legality of a monument in the rotunda of Caesar's courthouse is a question for Caesar." When Caesar is wrong, as he was in this case, we should use constitutional means to change his mind, which may mean replacing those who act in the name of Caesar. A particular merit of "Christian Duty and the Rule of Law" is that it rejects the common notion that, between the two, one must achieve some kind of "balance." Devotion to the rule of law is grounded in Christian duty, as, in certain specified cases, is disobedience to unjust laws. Civil disobedience, rightly understood, is in the service of the rule of law. Despite the filibustering obstructionism of Democrats in the Senate, Bill Pryor continues to pursue, with the full backing of the Bush Administration, his nomination to the federal bench. We are all indebted to him for his uncompromisingly articulate public witness.

■ October 5 was the beginning of Respect Life Week, and also the beginning of National Coming Out Week. At Boston College—a school "in the Jesuit tradition"—the promotion of gayness trumped the protection of unborn babies. On the student calendar, only National Coming Out Week is mentioned. October 5 was "Solidarity Sunday," and "All masses on campus will have a GLBT theme." Some students asked that pro-life petitions be included in the prayers of the faithful that Sunday and were told that they were free to propose such petitions from the congregation but the official focus was on affirming gays. The week's announced activities included a talk on gay issues in athletics, an evening titled "Guess Who's Gay," and a talk by author and professional Bush-hater (his self-description) Michael Moore. So much for Respect Life Week at Boston College, a school "in the Jesuit tradition."

■ To J.M. of Boston: the answer is that we haven't reviewed and will not review Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* for the same reason we will pass on *Armageddon*, the eleventh in the *Left Behind* series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. For a thorough debunking of the fatuities of *The Da Vinci Code*, check out Sandra Miesel in the September issue of *Crisis*. The tedious business probably had to be done, and I'm glad *Crisis* did it. For readers who are happily unaware of the book, Mr. Brown's thriller is about the real feminist Christianity in which Jesus marries Mary Magadalene and their progeny perpetuate the true faith to this day, despite the scheming cover-ups of the Vatican and a deeply sinister organization called Opus Dei. But you get the idea. I see that in the UK John Sutherland of the *Guardian* has a bit of fun indulging that paper's penchant for America bashing. "*The Da Vinci Code* is for cryptonoiacs—readers of a paranoid tendency for whom nothing is what it seems. Cryptonoia is more fun. For example, Princess Diana, as every conspiracy theorist knows, was murdered, but by whom? Think 13. The fatal Mercedes crashed at the 13th pillar of the Pont de l'Alma underpass, on August 31 ('13' in reverse) 1997. Diana was in her 37th year. Remember Friday 13, 1307, transpose a couple of digits, and all is clear. And who was Diana named after? The moon goddess. And what does Pont de l'Alma mean? 'Passage of the Moon Goddess.' Who

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killed her? Perhaps the Babylonian Brotherhood, as a sacrificial offering to their lunar and solar pagan deities (they sacrificed JFK, their sun god, on the anniversary of the papal bull banning the Knights Templar in 1307), or the Illuminati, or, conceivably, the Duke of Edinburgh as head of the reptilian world conspiracy. Fun, but bonkers. Why are Americans currently devouring books like *Armageddon* and *The Da Vinci Code*? To fill the hole where Cold War paranoia used to be. Theology, ideology—what's the difference? Old Europe, meanwhile, hasn't quite caught on. Writers like LaHaye, Jenkins, and Brown sell virtually nothing in this country. Thank God (or our sainted Moon Goddess) for that." Touché, I guess. But tell me more about this Princess Diana "cryptonoia." In what country, pray tell, is that happening? Madness is madness, to be sure, but one might think that there is at least some excuse, and venerable precedent, for being obsessed about God.

■ An Episcopalian friend expressed her puzzlement that the Episcopal Church can so cavalierly jettison doctrines while taking such a firm stand on questions of funding and authority. Paul Marshall of Freedom House came up with a possible answer in a statement by Karl Marx in his preface to the first volume of *Das Kapital*: "The English Established Church will more readily pardon an attack on 38 of its 39 articles than on 1/39th of its income." But we know that Marx got everything wrong. Well, almost everything.

■ *Xenophobes and Xenophiles: Italians and Islam* is a new book by Renzo Guolo that depicts a growing gap between the Pope and the Italian episcopate, including influential members of the Curia. Guolo writes regularly for *Avvenire*, the paper of the Italian bishops conference, and he says that until a decade ago the dominant response of the Italian church to Muslim immigration took the form of charitable work helping the newcomers to feel at home. In recent years, however, prominent bishops such as Alessandro Maggiolini of Como and Giacomo Cardinal Biffi of Bologna, along with bishops generally thought to be of a more "liberal" disposition, have been speaking more forcefully about the need to maintain the Christian identity of Italy and Europe, and about the religious and cultural intolerance of Islam, in Italy as elsewhere. Guolo describes John Paul's position as one of "dialogue to the extreme," while some of the Italian bishops have quietly taken to criticizing it as "dialogue to the point of extremism." It is no secret that, at the gathering of cardinals from around the world in 1994 where the Pope spoke of his intention to ask forgiveness for the historical wrongs committed by Catholics, including those against Muslims, he met with stiff resistance. Yet he has relentlessly moved ahead with his program of the "purification" and "healing" of memories. Guolo writes, "But this comes at the cost of humiliating the Church by burdening it with past wrongs, in the hope that others will admit their own sooner or later." Critics point out that there have been no reciprocal apologies by Muslims. But the Pope persists, believing that the alternative is a "clash of civilizations" that would have catastrophic consequences for all humanity. In deference to his office and his fragile health, says Guolo, bishops are reluctant to criticize the Pope publicly, but many think he is, not to put too fine a point on it, naïve. At the same time, the controversy over the constitution of the European Union has prompted repeated papal statements on the importance of affirming the Christian identity of Europe. There is a connection between culture and territory, the Pope says, and, also with respect to immigration, he urges a "cultural equilibrium." He has further left no doubt about the Church's universal mandate to evangelize, contending that evangelization and interreligious dialogue need not be mutually exclusive. Some Italian bishops, writes Guolo, seem embarrassed by Muslims who convert to Christianity and indifferent to their persecution by Muslims. Cardinal Biffi asserts a very different view: "To preach and baptize are foundational obligations of the Church. Jesus did not command us: preach the gospel to every creature—except to the Muslims, Jews, and the Dalai Lama." A curial cardinal once told me, "This Pope has no shame." He intended that admiringly, meaning that John Paul's commitment to interreligious dialogue is such that no number of rebuffs could deter him from reaching out to try again. The encounter with Islam, especially in the form of massive immigration, puts to severe test the Church's ability to simultaneously keep faith with the mandate to evangelize, to promote religious freedom, to engage in dialogue, and to sustain a Christian cultural identity. It is not surprising that the Church in Italy, and Western Europe more generally, experiences tensions in attending to these tasks, and it is probably not very helpful to frame the problem in terms of a stark choice between being a xenophobe or a xenophile.

■ Now she's gone and done it. The formidable Anne Applebaum, *Washington Post* columnist and author of a recent book on the Gulag Archipelago that received a deservedly enthusiastic review essay by Lawrence A. Uzzell in our November issue, writes about getting ready to go to New York. She rather

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dreads the prospect because in New York everybody is a political lefty. (I suspect she spends too much time on the Upper West Side.) In Washington, she says, the structured rivalry of the two parties guarantees that "the culture remains relentlessly bipartisan." She goes on to say: "For too long, Washingtonians have had an inferiority complex about New York, a 'real' city, supposedly, where the theater is so much better and there are so many more places to eat. It's time to face the truth: in Washington, we wouldn't have time to go to the theater even if it were better, and we'd usually eat lunch at our desks, even if we had somewhere better to go. Not only are we busy running the free world, we are equally busy arguing about it—and that's something they don't stoop to do in New York." Well, now. I admit that there's something to what she says. When I first came to New York, the serious arguments were held here and then we went to Washington to try to get our conclusions politically implemented. Usually without success, I might add. Today there are in Washington serious arguments galore among intellectuals with real firepower. Most of the politically influential think tanks are there. For me, the symbolic change was when Irving Kristol and Gertrude Himmelfarb turned coat and moved from New York to Washington in 1987. But Washington is a company town and the company's business is politics. It is All Politics All the Time. I don't want to say that Washington isn't a "real" city. But it is a city that is really about one thing. New York is about publishing, finance, fashion, communications, higher education, theater, and other worlds within worlds that make it not a metropolitan area but a metropolis. A real polis is about more than politics, and a "mother polis"—the meaning of metropolis—embraces just about everything. Including Anne Applebaum, who is welcome not just to visit but to come and live. One will like New York better, though, if one is open to talking about more than politics.

■ Many people responded with incredulity to the Episcopal Church's approval of same-sex blessings and, perhaps even more strongly, to the approval as bishop of a man who left his wife and children and later took up with a male partner. What on earth did the Episcopalians think they were doing? That question is answered, in part, by a letter that Presiding Bishop Frank T. Griswold wrote to the Episcopal clergy of the U.S. and the thirty-seven primates of the world-wide Anglican Communion. Griswold wrote: "I will say here that regardless of one's point of view of the outcome on various votes, General Convention was almost universally perceived to be a well-ordered and caring community with sensitivity to the feelings of others and with mutual respect. This was noted many times in the media and I believe was a witness to the world." The Presiding Bishop then proposed a distinctively, maybe exclusively, Anglican ecclesiology: "One of the great gifts we share as members of the Episcopal Church is that our life is configured in webs of relationship: congregations are bound into dioceses, dioceses are joined together in provinces and then the national church, and the Episcopal Church is then linked with other self-governing churches to form the Anglican Communion. And communion, in its various forms, is nothing less than our participation in the Trinitarian life of God." Whereas in the past Scripture and tradition, as, for instance, in the Thirty-nine Articles, were viewed as normative, Griswold offers a developed understanding of the discernment of truth: "I find it illuminating to think of these webs of relationship which constitute our lives as being forcefields of energy in which our various perspectives and ways of embodying the gospel constantly interact—challenging and enlarging one another and thereby more fully revealing God's truth. Difference, and the capacity to welcome otherness, are essential to the vitality of these various forcefields. And the energy which gives them life is love. This is my understanding of what it means to be the body of Christ." While Anglican provinces that threaten to break fellowship with the Episcopal Church USA contend that the Word of God as interpreted in the Great Tradition cannot be replaced by "forcefields of energy," Bishop Griswold appeals to what he sees as a fuller understanding of revealed truth. "It is in that fullness that seemingly irreconcilable points of view can address one another in love and receive one another's truth," he writes. Those who believe that homogenital acts are in accord with God's will and those who believe they are contrary to God's will can receive one another's truth, even though the Episcopal Church USA affirms the truth of the former position and rejects the truth of the latter, so long as Episcopalians maintain "a well-ordered and caring community with sensitivity to the feelings of others and with mutual respect." It is hoped that the Presiding Bishop's letter will clarify what Episcopalians think they are doing.

■ The eucharistic prayer used in a liturgy at the church-wide assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in Milwaukee was borrowed from All People's Gathering Lutheran Church in the same city. God—referred to as him/her/it—was informed, "We know that your

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names are as numerous and varied as your people, to whom you reveal yourself in different ways so that we may be your co-creative, imaginative lovers." To which Pastor Russell Saltzman, editor of *Forum Letter*, comments, "Are we talking Trinity here, or a fertility Baal?" The prayer continued, "In our friends and lovers, our spouses and children, we see you coming with power." Catholics often complain, with considerable justice, about the banality of the English translation of the Mass. Let's hear it for banality.

■ "Hello, butter-colored worm." That's the opening line of a poem that didn't pass muster, says J. Bottum. His day job is with the *Weekly Standard*, where he wrote this about being our poetry editor: "Of course, day after day, the mail also brings good work, poetry one is proud to publish. But for magazines like FIRST THINGS, the rejection rate is over 99 percent, and all those unusable poems must be ploughed through as well—and while I'm doing it, about the best you can say is beware, beware his flashing eyes, his floating hair. Sheer plod may actually make plough-down sillion shine, but I think I'd have to ask the author for a little more clarity. Still, good fences make good neighbors, that's obvious enough. I should have been a pair of ragged claws scuttling across the floors of silent seas. That needs a comma after 'claws,' maybe, but I'm not the man to do it. Not today. The native hue of resolution has been sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought. The force that through the green fuse drives the flower is driving me mad. Weave a circle round him thrice and close your eyes with holy dread, for he on honeydew hath fed and edited some poetry. I have heard the poets singing, each to each. I do not think that they will sing to me." Ah, but they do, Jody. Just the other day a poet was by who sang your praises. But then, he was in that less than one percent who are the Elect, so he would, wouldn't he?

■ John Derbyshire writes for *National Review* and is almost unfailingly wise and winsome in espousing his very definite views. Now comes the Christmas season, and with it the usual disputes about the crèche at the courthouse and related public displays that run the danger of intimating why Christmas is called Christmas. The cry of "Keep Christ in Christmas" is again heard in the land, along with the complaints about how anything specifically Christian offends those who are too sensitive for decent company. In that connection, an item written by Mr. Derbyshire last December is of continuing pertinence. "I just got back from my second-grade son's 'songfest.' What a mess we are in! Tots in Santa Clause hats singing Hanukkah songs. . . . Isn't Hanukkah past and gone already? A couple of years from now, no doubt they'll have Ramadan worked in there somehow. And of course there were no songs AT ALL referring to the birth of Jesus Christ—this is a public school. We only got 'Frosty the Snowman,' 'Silver Bells,' 'I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus.' Speaking personally, as a Christian, I don't want the commemoration of my Savior's birth mucked about with in this way. I'm starting to feel I'd like the whole thing kept IN the precincts of my church and OUT of the public sphere. In short, I am swinging round to the ACLU position. No offense to anyone, but I don't want my kids singing Hanukkah songs—that's not their religion. If I were Jewish, I wouldn't want my kids wearing Santa hats, either. (NB: 'Santa' means 'Saint'—i.e., in the Christian religion.) I can't see why Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and atheists should get a holiday to celebrate an event they believe to be of no importance. Let's repeal all laws making religious festivals public holidays. If people want to take off for Good Friday, Yom Kippur, Eid Al-fitr, Kali Puja, or the Wiccan Solstice, let them make suitable arrangements with their employers, privately. Give Christmas back to us Christians." I'm afraid that Mr. Derbyshire did not swing around to the ACLU position; he was taken in by a long-standing ACLU ploy that invokes "pluralism" in order to secure universal submission to the doctrine of the naked public square. Anything religious, especially if associated with the religion with which nine out of ten Americans identify, must be denied public salience. The trick is overtly to exclude it, or trivialize it into oblivion (e.g., tots in Santa hats). If among the chief purposes of education is to transmit a world to another generation, and if parents have the authority to decide which world is to be transmitted (and it is agreed since the 1925 *Pierce* decision that they do), Mr. Derbyshire's experience underscores again the necessity of parental choice in education. But even parents who send their children to government schools should insist that pluralism means the respectful engagement of differences, not the denial of differences. They can point out the educational malfeasance involved in not teaching children why this time of year is called "the holiday season." Of course Jews and other minorities should not be required to express religious views that are not their own. Although I'm not sure Mr. Derbyshire should object to his child singing Hanukkah songs, since Hanukkah celebrates an event in the history of Israel of which Christians believe they are part. Where the number in a minority group or groups is large enough, they might present a program of songs and dramas of their own choosing. Since local control

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of government schools is very much worth defending, this becomes a matter of local option. That means that, in a school that is almost entirely Jewish or Muslim, the Christian minority would be similarly accommodated. Mr. Derbyshire is entirely right about the premier responsibility of home and church for religious teaching and celebration, but with respect to his local school, he should join others in insisting that genuine pluralism be given a try, and not cave under the force of the militant secularism of the ACLU.

■ On October 4, 1970, Paul VI solemnly declared Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) and Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) doctors of the Church. They were the only women to bear that august title until John Paul II added Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897) to their company in 1997. I don't know when my fascination with Catherine began, but only last year did I have opportunity to visit the church in Siena where her head is on display and she is the object of an obviously lively devotion. The winding narrow streets and the houses around the church are much as they must have been in the fourteenth century. The church itself is somewhat dirty and disheveled, and is marred by what must be some of the ugliest contemporary stained glass in Europe. But it occurred to me that Catherine probably does not mind. In reproaching bishops and cardinals, in calling the Pope back from Avignon to Rome, in renewing corrupt monastic foundations, Catherine was accustomed to the disheveled state of what is nonetheless the virgin bride of Christ. A Dominican sister, Suzanne Noffke, has an instructive article on Catherine in a special issue of *Theology Today*, published by Princeton Theological Seminary, on medieval women theologians. Sister Suzanne is an authority on Catherine, and her article is titled "Catherine of Siena: Justly Doctor of the Church?" Was she made a doctor—meaning teacher—of the Church as a token of sensitivity to the current form of "the woman question"? Was she really a theologian or just a devotional writer? Or, as some would have it, a "mystic," meaning a female eccentric who is not to be taken too seriously? In her article, Sr. Suzanne examines the documents of the canonical process that led to Catherine's elevation and finds them to be a mixed bag. Her own conviction is that Catherine was a very great theologian indeed, her specialty being what today we would call pastoral theology. She includes her new translation of some of Catherine's writings, including this appeal to Urban VI, who had silenced a Dominican for raising questions about certain abuses and papal appointments: "Oh, most holy father, be patient when people talk to you about these things, for they speak only for God's honor and your well-being, as children must do who tenderly love their father. They cannot bear anything being done that will harm or dishonor their father. No, they are in their concern always on the alert, since they are well aware that their father has a huge family to care for, yet has only one person's vision. So if his true-born children were not concerned enough to watch out for their father's honor and good, he would often make mistakes. And so it is with you, most holy father. You are father and lord of the whole body of Christianity; all of us are under your holiness' wings. As far as authority is concerned you can do anything, but in terms of vision you can see no more than any one person can. So it is essential that your children singleheartedly, without any slavish fear, look out for God's honor as well as your honor and welfare and that of the little sheep who are under your staff. Now I know that your holiness wants helpers who will really help you—but you have to be patient enough to listen to them. When a son or daughter of yours comes to tell you about something that person thinks might harm the Church or souls or might embarrass your holiness, it should pain you if that person would foolishly, in your presence, refuse to tell you frankly the pure truth as it stands. For nothing ought to be kept hidden or secret from you." That is a model of deferentially reproachful persuasion that you might want to keep for reference, in the event you ever have a friend who gets on the wrong side of the pope.

■ There has been a pause in our ongoing discussion under the title of "Scandal Time." That is not because, as some wishfully think, the scandals in the Catholic Church are behind us. Far from it. In January, the John Jay College study commissioned by the National Review Board is scheduled for release. That will almost certainly be the occasion for another round of major media attention. In the next issue we hope to have a comprehensive summary of where we have been and what will likely happen next. What will likely happen next, needless to say, is not to be confused with what should happen next. There are on the horizon few, if any, signs of the great renewal of fidelity that John Paul II said should emerge on the far side of this Long Lent.

■ We continue to receive requests from Readers of FIRST THINGS (ROFTERS) who would like to convene independent discussion groups in their local community. If you are a ROFTER living in one of the cities listed below and would like to join other

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Whether you are part of a ROFTERS discussion group or savor your issues in splendid solitude, please note that this is the time of the annual fund appeal for FT. You will soon be receiving a letter on that in the mail. We do this only once a year, and we do it because we must. Please be generous. And please be assured of my prayers that the coming holy days will be filled with grace and glory for you and yours.

■ We will be happy to send a sample issue of this journal to people who you think are likely subscribers. Please send names and addresses to First Things, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, New York 10010 (or e-mail to subscriberservices@pma-inc.net). On the other hand, if they're ready to subscribe, call toll free 1-877-905-9920, or visit www.firstthings.com.

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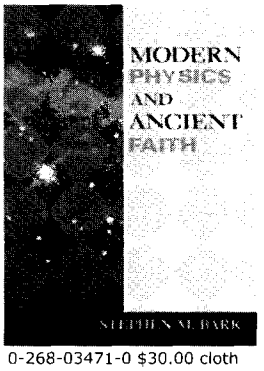

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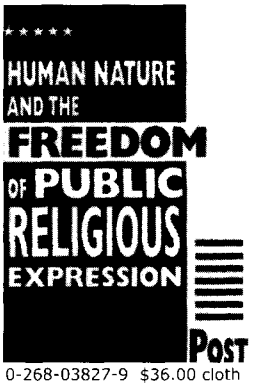

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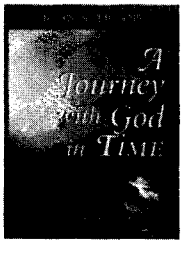

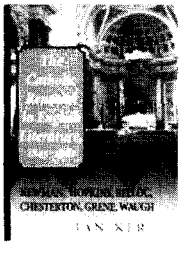

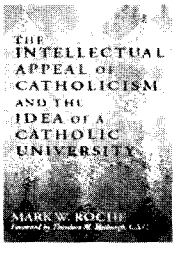

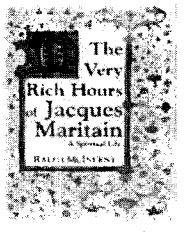

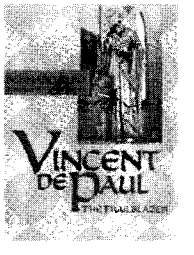

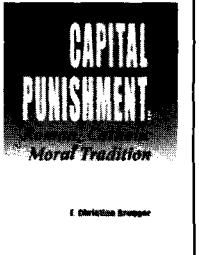

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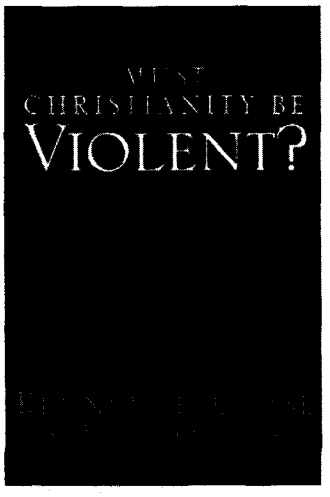

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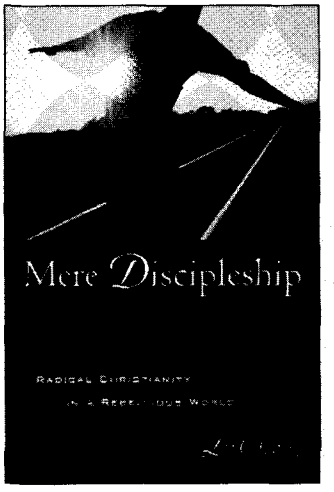

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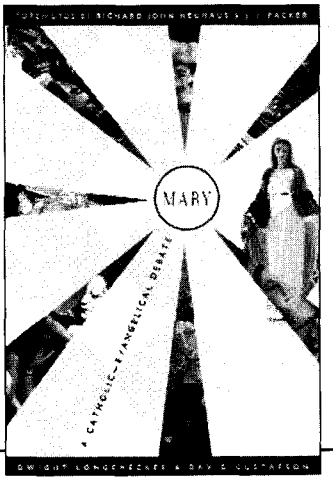

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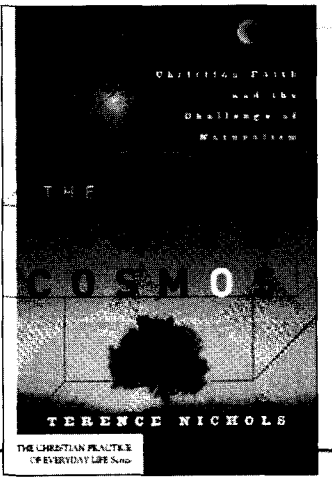

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